

CEMETERY DANCE



WINTER 1992 / Volume Four, Issue One

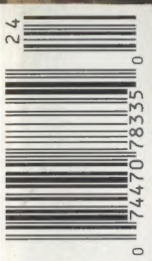
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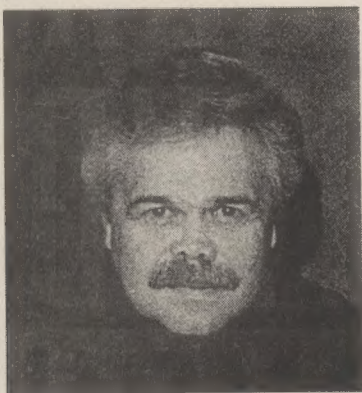
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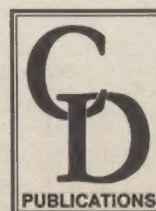
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WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

RICHARD T. CHIZMAR

CEMETERY DANCE #11 -- Welcome back to another issue of *Cemetery Dance*, the magazine of dark mystery, suspense, & horror fiction, non-fiction features, columns, interviews, news, and reviews. If you have picked us up from a book or specialty store and are reading us for the first time... enjoy this Winter Issue. We hope you are impressed enough to subscribe or keep an eye open for the Spring issue, arriving at bookstores the first week of May.

**

Instead of my usual editorial, I've decided to use this space to answer some of the many letters we receive here at the magazine, to address the questions asked most often.

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

Effective immediately, the quarterly issues of *Cemetery Dance* will be released during the first week of February, May, August, and November. Remember, all subscriber copies are mailed bulk rate, so please allow one to two weeks for delivery. We have no current plans to move to a bi-monthly schedule, but you never know...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND/OR COLUMNISTS

Reader response is encouraged. Send all "letters to the editor" to the editorial address on page 2. Although we do not have a Letters Column, our columnists would love to read your letters personally. All mail sent to columnists at our editorial address C/O *Cemetery Dance*, will be forwarded to the appropriate author. I can't emphasize enough how important reader response is to our many columnists.

SUBMISSION POLICY

We read 400-500 submissions each month, and I read and respond to each one personally. Send for our editorial guidelines, but be sure to include a self-addressed-stamped- envelope, or you will not hear back

from us. Although the majority of *CD's* contents is filled by professional authors, we are eager to find new, promising talent and have published "first stories" in each of the last several issues. Read several issues of the magazine, follow our writers' guidelines closely, and write an original and powerful story... and you could find yourself in these pages.

New "CD PUBLICATIONS" imprint

What is CD Publications? It is the name of our new hardcover book imprint. Under this imprint, we plan to publish the best authors in the horror, suspense, mystery, and crime genres. Short story collections, anthologies, novels -- we plan to do it all.

Our first title, Ed Gorman's first short story collection, *Prisoners & Other Stories* (with a special Dean R. Koontz Afterword) will hit the stands this Spring, followed by *The Definitive Best of The Horror Show* (Summer), and two simultaneous Fall releases -- a Joe R. Lansdale signed, Limited Edition of *Act of Love* (with a new Introduction) and the debut of our new dark suspense series, *Thrillers*, featuring an Introduction by Lansdale and original work by Richard Laymon, Chet Williamson, Nancy Collins, and Ardath Mayhar. *Thrillers* #2 (next year) will be Introduced by Ed Gorman and feature new work from F. Paul Wilson and three yet-to-be-determined authors.

We certainly hope you will continue to support us. How can you show us your support, you ask?

Thanks for asking... just drop an order in the mail for our debut title, Ed Gorman's *Prisoners & Other Stories* (an order form can be found on page one of this issue). Thanks.

**

Enough for this time. Please remember... Ingram Periodicals is *Cemetery Dance's* bookstore distributor. If you frequent a chain or independent book store, please ask the manager to order *Cemetery Dance* for your area. In addition, we are carried by virtually all the specialty/comic distributors, so please ask your specialty store managers, too. Thanks -- we appreciate it!

Now turn up the lights, flip the page, and start the dance...



APOTROPAICS

NORMAN PARTRIDGE

NORMAN PARTRIDGE has appeared in *Cemetery Dance* several times, as well as in many top anthologies, including *Chilled to the Bone*, *Dark At Heart*, *Shivers*, *The Earth Strikes Back*, and *Final Shadows*. Partridge has a smooth and easy writing style -- similar to Stephen King, many say -- and my only complaint about his skyrocketing career thus far is the lack of a published novel ... but that should soon change!

I was heading for the creek, whistling "Heartbreak Hotel" and minding my own business, when Ross caught up to me and told me about the vampire at Todd Palmer's house.

"Jason," he gasped, almost doubling over as he caught up to me and dropped his hands onto his knees. "Man, we thought you'd never get home from vacation. Todd and Dave and me, we didn't know what to do. But now that you're back ..."

He left the sentence unfinished. Suddenly, he wore the relieved look of a tired pitcher who'd just been pulled from a tough game. He straightened, still a head shorter than me even though we were both eleven, and he shot the look my way one more time, just to be sure that I hadn't missed it.

I flicked his Brooklyn Dodgers cap off his head. "Pull the other one, Ross. You guys have probably been planning this for two weeks." I shook my head. "C'mon --Bela Lugosi in corn country? Is that the best you can do? Isn't it bad enough that my folks dragged me through twenty-two states in fourteen days? And, man, all I've got to show for it is this chintzy knife from Yosemite."

I pulled the knife fast enough to make Ross jump (he's a hopeless coward). It wasn't really chintzy, but it wasn't the one I wanted, either. That one cost ten bucks and had an authentic ivory handle. My old man wouldn't go for it though, so I had to settle for the two buck special that had a genuine plastic handle with a hand-painted view of Half Dome.

Hand-painted in Taiwan, that is.

Ross stared at the knife. No, he did more than stare--his gaze was riveted on the shiny blade. "Oh, man," he said. "This is scary. I mean, you buying a knife. It's like you're psychic or something. I swear to God it is!"

"What're you talking about?"

"C'mon and I'll show you."

Ross scooped up his cap and we walked the short

distance to Palmer's cornfield. We hopped the fence and blazed a trail between two rows of dead cornstalks. I was surprised that Mr. Palmer hadn't plowed the field and planted another crop. Todd's dad was usually real quick about that kind of stuff. My dad always said that Mr. Palmer was a hard man, a man who didn't brook nonsense. That was the way Todd's dad managed his farm, pushing its crop potential to the limit, and my dad seemed to think that was the way Mr. Palmer handled his kids, too.

But something had slowed Mr. Palmer's clock-work pace. Maybe for once he hadn't had time, or maybe he'd wanted a vacation of his own, or maybe ...

Maybe anything. Who knows why things happen? I mean, really? People say things. They do things. But who ever knows? Really?

Ross pushed between two tall stalks that crackled like ancient parchment. I followed. We cut through a couple more rows and came to the center of the field.

And there it was.

A naked mound of dirt, dark clods dried gray and hard in the hot sun.

A grave, I thought, shivering. It wasn't an ordinary grave, either, and not just because it was in the middle of a cornfield. Imbedded in this grave, punched into it like it was some weird pincushion, were dozens of stakes and knives, their hilts barely visible. Tent stakes, survey stakes. Boy Scout knives, ordinary silverware, putty knives, and fancy stuff that must have been pure silver.

Ross was talking again. "We had to steal some of 'em. Christ, my mom'll kill me if she finds out I took Aunt Alma's silver. But we had to, 'cause we can't let him come back. Oh, man, he'll be pissed if he comes back, and I don't want to think about what he'd do to Todd, and to me and Dave because we helped Todd." He bent low, touching knives and stakes, making sure that they were firmly planted in the hard ground. "So we stuck this stuff into the grave, and he can't get out without killing himself again. That makes sense, don't it, Jase? I mean, you know how this stuff works ..."

Ross kept talking, the way he always does, but I wasn't listening.

It was my turn to stare.

My turn for riveted gazes.

The churned, dry dirt of the grave. The stakes, brown and hard and smooth, like weird roots. The silver

knives, hilts glistening in the morning sunlight. The clumps of earth, like dead fists.

Not dead. Undead.

Because this was a vampire's grave.

**

Standing there surrounded by oak trees that were a good hundred years old, Todd's house looked small. The Palmers had lived on the outskirts of Fiddler for three generations, and the house had stood the test of time. A couple coats of white paint every two years helped, and so did old man Palmer's skill as a carpenter, but I always thought that there was something about the way the house rested under those big trees that helped protect it.

Today it didn't look protected. It looked trapped, ensnared by a hundred gnarled arms, all twisting toward it and holding it down.

Todd answered our knock. He didn't look right. There was a deep green bruise on his jaw, and his eyes were red, and it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that he'd been crying.

Ross opened his trap and started to whisper too loudly, and Todd held a finger to his lips. "My folks are gone," Todd said. "They headed down to see Grandma in Earlimart. They don't think she's gonna make it this time, and she won't go back to the hospital. Sis is upstairs, sleeping again. That's all she does lately." He opened the screen door. "Come in, but be quiet."

We followed Todd through the living room. It was stark, like a room where no one lived at all. No television, no hi-fi, no coffee table, certainly no magazines or flowers. Just a worn rocker, a few chairs so stiff that even the doilies on their arms seemed out of place, and a big wrought iron cross hanging over the fireplace.

A cross that a hard man would appreciate, I thought, and then I felt kind of weird, because it was a thought my dad would have had.

Anyway, Todd moved down the hallway, his right shoulder rubbing the flowery wallpaper. He came to a little table by the staircase and picked up the telephone.

He didn't have to dial. It was a party line, and Dave's mom was in the middle of a call. "I hate to interrupt, Mrs. Sanchez," Todd said, his voice quiet but firm. "Can I talk to Dave? It's kind of important."

Mrs. Sanchez must have agreed, because Todd didn't say anything else. In a town like Fiddler, where everybody thinks they know everybody else's business, a kid with a dying grandma can get away with anything.

We stood in the quiet hallway, waiting for Dave to come to the phone. I stepped to the foot of the staircase. A doorway stood open on the landing above. I saw a bed, and someone's arm dangling over the side. The person in the bed rolled over just as I started up the stairs, and I saw long blond hair and a white nightgown dipping low

over a white shoulder.

Janet Palmer, Todd's sister.

Her eyes caught mine, but it was like they weren't quite focused. "Dave?" she whispered. "Is that you? I'm sorry, Dave. I'm so sorry."

I backed down the staircase, embarrassed, and didn't say a word.

Todd said a couple words to Dave, because that was all it took. Then he grabbed my shirttail, and I turned and saw those red eyes of his.

I couldn't read them at all.

Upstairs, Janet was crying.

"C'mon," Todd said. "Meeting time."

**

We sat under Todd's front porch. The air was still and cool. There was enough room for kids to sit comfortably, but not enough room for adults, so it was the perfect place to go when we didn't want to be bothered.

"Tell us what to do, Jase," Ross said. "Tell us if we done right. I mean, you know about this stuff. You read all those monster magazines and see all those movies."

"Yeah," I said. "You've said that about a jillion times today."

Dave laughed, twirled his drumsticks, and did a little drum roll on the rubber pad the band teacher had given him so he could practice over the summer. His folks weren't too well off and he couldn't afford a snare drum, let alone the fancy set he wanted.

Dave carried the practice pad with him everywhere. He put up with band, but he really wanted to rock 'n' roll. He said he was going to get out of Fiddler and tour with Ritchie Valens or somebody like that. Dave was the coolest kid I knew, the leader of our group, and I felt like he was about five years ahead of us in almost everything. Girls liked him, and he didn't put on a show with them or pretend that he minded their attention.

"So who's going to tell me what's going on?" I asked.

Ross started blabbing again, and I cut him off with a hard glance. Todd didn't look like he was up to talking. Dave shrugged and started in, setting his drumsticks aside.

"I guess I was the first one to figure out what was going on." He sighed, his shoulders slumping. "But I don't really want to talk about it. It was hard enough to tell Todd the first time, and to do it again . . ."

"You gotta tell," Ross put in, and then he buttoned up before anyone could punch him.

"Yeah, I gotta tell." Dave sighed again. "You know that we've got a party line with Todd's family. Well, I got so I would listen in every now and then. At first it was just for fun. One time, I heard Mr. Palmer cussing out some tractor salesman. And I heard Mrs. Palmer gossiping with Ross's mom almost every day." He paused, his eyes

locked on his drumsticks as if he didn't dare look up at me and speak at the same time. "But, to tell you the truth, Janet was the one I really wanted to hear when I picked up the phone."

I glanced at Todd. His eyes were glazed over, and he was rubbing the welt on his jaw. I knew then, even before Dave said what he was going to say, that Todd would rather get punched out than listen to Dave's story again.

Suddenly, I knew what kind of story it was going to be.

People say things. They do things.

And sometimes they even tell the truth.

Dave went on, still looking down at his drumsticks. "I know that she's six years older than me. I know that. But when I'd hear Janet talking to her girlfriends, I didn't miss a word. And when she wouldn't tell them the name of the guy she had a crush on, I'd imagine that she was talking about me. And when she told Ross's sister that she was in love with a guy who was in love with her, too, I imagined that she knew how I felt about her without me even saying, and that she felt exactly the same way about me."

"Without even saying," Todd whispered, still rubbing his jaw.

Dave nodded, still looking down.

"Tell him what happened next," Ross blurted. "Tell him about the vam--"

"Shut up, Ross," I said.

"Yeah, shut up," Dave said, but his voice didn't have any strength. He looked at me, and I knew that it took everything he had just to hold my gaze.

He didn't look like a leader anymore. He didn't look like a guy who had everything figured out. He looked like an eleven-year-old boy who'd been scared by an expert.

He kept talking. "It was two weeks ago, just about the time you left on vacation. I got up around midnight to get a drink of water. I don't know why, but I picked up the phone, even though it was late.

"I heard him then. I had to strain to understand him, because his voice was so quiet and smooth. Her voice sounded the same way. But I'd never heard Janet talk like that before. It made me feel sick, some of the things she said, and the hard way he laughed when she said them." Dave swallowed. "And I felt sick, too, because suddenly I knew she hadn't been talking about me when she talked to her girlfriends.

"I wanted to hang up, but I couldn't. And then came the worst part. He said, *You think your little friend is listening? You think he's gettin' a thrill?* and she just laughed. I hung up then. I didn't even try to be sneaky. I'm sure they heard me.

"I tried to go to sleep, but all I could do was toss and turn. I knew that I'd never be able to look Janet in the eye again. And then, in the middle of the night, I heard a

motorcycle out on the road, full open and racing fast. I got out of bed and ran to the window just in time to see Janet riding with him, her arms wrapped around his chest, her fingers digging into his leather jacket, her blond hair blowing in the wind. They headed up the road, toward wherever he was from, I guess, and they came back about an hour before dawn.

"That should have been the end of it. Even then, I thought it was spooky that they knew I was listening to them that night. I mean, I knew it was weird. Too weird." Dave's voice quavered with shame. "But I couldn't stop listening. I heard them every night. The things they said ... some of them they said to me, because they knew I was listening. And I heard the motorcycle. Roaring out on the road, coming and going night after night. And then one day I heard Todd's mom talking to Ross's mom --"

"I heard it too," Ross said. "I mean, Mom told Dad about it. She said that an evil boy was sucking Janet Palmer dry, sucking the blood of Jesus right out of her and dragging her straight down to hell."

"Your mom is pretty wild with the fire and brimstone bit," I said. "She's said worse stuff about me, I'll bet."

"No way," Ross said. "She was serious. She knew that this guy was a vampire! She knew it! But she was afraid to say the word!"

Dave shook his head. "I don't know, Jase. Maybe you're right. But if you'd heard this guy. If you'd heard the things that he said --"

"Or if you'd seen what he did," Ross put in. "I didn't see it. Not myself. But Todd was there when it happened. Todd saw the whole thing."

Todd stopped rubbing his jaw. He started talking, but his voice was distant, like it wasn't a voice at all but a little machine that had clicked on inside of him. "We went to see Grandma. Mom and Dad and me. You guys know how sick she is. Janet didn't go. She said she wasn't feeling well. She whispered something to Mom about the way she felt, and Mom blushed and said it was okay for her to stay home.

"Grandma talked for a long time. It was fun to listen to her. She talked about her courting days, and how wonderful Grandpa was back then. It was like she wasn't sick at all. She fell asleep with a smile on her face.

"We got home late. Dad saw the motorcycle first. He stopped the car at the end of the driveway, got out, and started for the house. He was walking fast, but he didn't run. Mom just sat there in the front seat, not moving at all. I sat in the back, staring at her hair. It was all neat in a bun and it didn't move, either. It was like she was a dummy or something. I remember thinking that."

Todd lay back and closed his eyes. I couldn't decide if it helped him remember or if he wanted to hide from us. He said, "I heard Janet scream, and I scrambled out of the car. Mom was screaming at me, but I didn't stop running. I banged through the screen door and the

screaming was really loud, like it was bottled up in the house.

"I almost stopped running when I got to the foot of the stairs, but it was too late. I took them three at a time and then I was in Janet's room. She was in a corner, all twisted up like she wanted to hide. She didn't have any clothes on and I saw the bruises on her neck where he'd ... and there were bruises on her boobs, too." He sobbed. "And then I saw the blood. I saw where she was ... bleeding. It was on her legs and ... and ..."

Todd was crying now, and there was no stopping his tears. "And there was blood on the sheets. Dad pinned the vampire to the floor with his knees, straddling him. The guy -- the thing -- it was real white. Its arms and legs were long and skinny, like it was a big spider. Dad had the wrought iron cross in his hands, and he bashed ... and he hit the thing again and again, and the guy -- the vampire -- was twitching and Janet was crying and ... its arms and legs were twitching ... and the cross ... it worked and ..."

Dave's hand dropped onto Todd's shoulder. Todd stopped talking, but he couldn't stop sobbing.

"That was what happened," Dave said. "Todd's dad sent him to bed, hit him hard when Todd tried to go back to Janet's room. He told Todd that the guy was okay, that he'd only beat him up so he wouldn't come back and hurt Janet again. But Todd knew that wasn't true. He could see the cornfield from his bedroom window, and he saw his father go out there that night and dig a grave."

"But Mr. Palmer didn't put a stake in the vampire's heart," Ross said. "At least we don't think so. That's why we put the knives and stakes in the grave. 'Cause Todd saw Janet. He saw that blood. He knew what really happened."

"It really happened," I said. "Everything you told me. It really happened?"

They nodded. No one said anything for a long

time. Then Ross started in again. "It's just like they said. It's true, every word. I mean, the vampire only came at night. On the phone, he knew that Dave was listening. They can read minds, right? And the things it said to Janet, and the things it made her say. They can hypnotize people, y'know, make them say or do anything. And the blood. Todd saw the blood." Ross hugged himself and rocked back and forth. "It's scary. I mean, I found where Todd's dad hid the vampire's motorcycle. It's down by the creek. It's black. It's all busted up now, but it doesn't have any mirrors, and I think it never did. Understand? It doesn't have any mirrors!" He was rocking like crazy now. "I don't think the vampire can come back. We did the right thing, didn't we Jase? It can't come back, can it?"

I shook my head.

Dave picked up his drumsticks and thrummed them gently on the practice pad, but he couldn't find a beat. "It's hard," he said, and he almost sounded like Ross. "It's hard to know what we should do next."

I looked at them, and I was with them, and I wanted to help them.

I looked at Todd. He couldn't do it. He was the son of a hard man, and he'd been broken.

Dave couldn't do it. He was still in love. If he heard Janet say how sorry she was, he'd never forget it.

Ross couldn't do it. Not on his best day. Not ever. "She won't get up," Todd said. "She won't eat ..."

Dave started to cry.

Gently, I slid the drumsticks out of his hands.

I opened my new knife.

Sometimes people say things. Sometimes they do things.

But nobody said a word, and nobody moved, while I sharpened the stakes.

-- CD

HAGGIS

The Official Newsletter of the Kent Montana Fan Club

YES! CHARLES L. GRANT'S HAGGIS! A totally new publication designed to enhance, complement, and unashamedly shill the Kent Montana/Lionel Fenn filmatic book experience (latest full-color epic -- *Kent Montana and The Once and Future Thing*. Ace Books, nicely priced, in the not unlikely event that you have never heard of him; or Lionel). There are no pretensions here. There are no intellectual assaults upon your vital critical thinking abilities. The newsletter is designed for no other reason than to have some ridiculous fun, tell some truly awful jokes, write really long sentences, and generally mess around with reality a little, a commodity we have, in our opinion, too damn much these days.

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RAMBLINGS FROM THE DARK #14

On Composing A Rap Song For Joe Bill Spain And Other Excitements Of The Writing Life:

It's a bitch being a writer, some of the time. Okay, it's a bitch being a writer most of the time. It's been said before by a number of people, but it bears repeating: writing, like most other forms of artistry, is one of the most solitary professions in the world. We're not talking *author* here. There's a difference. An author is what you are when you've finished the book/story and it's been published. As in: "He's the author of . . .". You're also an author when you're out in public, at conventions, conferences, lecturing in schools or to groups, giving interviews, all that peripheral business which some see as perks and others see as the inevitable (in the death and taxes sense) consequence of essentially choosing to be a hermit for some small or major part of your life.

Writing is taking a part of yourself, consciously or not, and exposing it on paper for others to see, pick at, admire, hate, or simply ignore; writing is, for those who are honest about it, dealing with parts of yourself that you never let anyone else see, ever; writing is dreaming with your fingers, your soul, and your mind.

Writing is so damned lonely that some of us can stand it for only

a few hours every day; yet for others it's so seductive that dealing with the so-called "real" world becomes as much a dark fantasy as the dark fantasy itself. The difference is, we can't control it.

It's kind of like making love to a black widow spider.

There are ways, however, should you wish to take them, to avoid being consumed.

Hobbies that require great concentration are probably best because they leave you no time to think about the work in progress whispering to you from your typewriter. That's why long drives, reading, watching movies, playing catch with the kids, going for walks, listening to music, etc. aren't much help. There are too many opportunities to *think*; and if you think, sooner or later you're going to think about what you're working on now, what you'd like to work on next, or you get hit with an "Hey, that's not a bad idea, I wonder if I can use it."

If, on the other hand, you simply must write, there's no getting around it, but you don't want, or can't for any number of reasons, work on that new horror notion, try a horror of a different kind. You are, after all, a writer. And a writer writes, right? So try something so radically different that you can't possibly concentrate on anything else, like axing the

neighbor or exploring a psychotic mind or figuring out the perfect opening sentence that's been eluding you for months.

Try, for example, writing a rap song for Joe Bill Spain.

Sooner or later, you see, working among, with, and around the Dark for so long is going to get depressing. Really depressing. It doesn't make any difference if your heroes and heroines escape and/or are triumphant. It's the Dark that takes all the energy, and it's the Dark you have to keep at bay for a while.

I do it by going not so quietly insane (or rather, more nuts than I already am). Radically different, for me, is writing humorous (one hopes) B-movie horror and science fiction adventures about a character named Kent Montana, under the pseudonym, Lionel Fenn. As I've said elsewhere, these books have no pretensions, no lingering messages, no political statements, no subtext, no reason for existing at all except to tell really bad jokes and have some fun with reality, such as it is.

And have an entirely different kind of fun than writing something like *Something Stirs*.

Fun; yes. The absolute best word.

Because make no mistake about it: I truly do have *fun* writing dark fantasy. I love it. It excites me.

It's no more work to me than, say, sleeping, or eating Chunkys, or watching *Killer Klowns From Outer Space* whilst munching on Cheez-Its and chocolate milk. Granted, it's not the kind of fun a lot of other people would choose; but still, it's fun.

However, having fun that way all the time has its limits. You don't necessarily get tired of it; you just don't want it to become that dreaded "w" word (*work*, for those of you who work for a living). So, to preserve that particular kind of energy, to prevent that excitement from dying, and to help pay some bills, and to revitalize myself in a way I've found much more productive (in the emotional sense) than raking leaves, or walking away from the keyboard, I decided to take all the jokes not permitted in the somber stuff and put it in stuff that is, by no stretch of anybody's imagination, somber, even when it's supposed to be.

A column or two ago, I mentioned that I absolutely love not just bad films (the kind that are just so bad they're funny), but especially bad black-and-white films from the 40s and 50s. Giant bugs, bug-eyed aliens, bug-eyed scientists, screwy science, screwier fantasies, busty heroines, muscular heroes, wise-cracking sidekicks who always get killed ten minutes before the end . . . and all those delightful peripheral characters who give those films their special flavor. This, I hasten to add, includes all the good sf and horror films of the time as well, only not as lovingly.

So I've tried to preserve them, and what I love about them, in these Kent Montana books.

Which brings me to Joe Bill Spain.

I'm currently working on a series of four YA dark fantasies, and at the same time working up a plot (somewhere in the back of my head) for a new dark fantasy novel for which I have an idea but no story. Concurrently, I've also premiered a newsletter for Kent, and need to fill at least 16 pages of it every two months. So naturally, while I'm chasing some kids

down a dark street, I'm also thinking up the worst jokes I can.

Don't ask me why, but the other day I decided that a rap song would be funny.

This is exactly what I meant when I said going nuts.

Joe Bill Spain, you see, is a character in *The Once and Future Thing*. Kind of the sidekick. A chauffeur who lifts weights and wears a green polyester uniform. He helps Kents battle the evil scientist who's trying to cross humans with alligators to come up with cheap labor in order to revitalize the stagnant Louisiana economy, get more rich than he already is, and eventually take over the world. So I says to myself, out of the clear blue haze the cigarette smoke makes in my office, that maybe Joe Bill ought to have a song in the next newsletter. Not just any song, either. A rap song.

So I did it.

Or most of it, at this writing.

Where did the idea come from? How the hell should I know? It just did. Will I finish it? Sure, why not? Will I actually have the nerve to publish it? If you've read any of the Kent Montana books, you already know the answer to that one. As Charles Grant, I am usually fairly constrained in print; as Lionel Fenn, I have absolutely no shame. Is this an insidious, self-serving plug for the Lionel Fenn/Kent Montana books, and also the newsletter which I've cleverly not named in order to pique your interest? If you've seen my latest royalty checks, you know the answer to that one, too.

But . . .

When I was in grade school and high school, my mother used to scold me all the time for staying inside and reading instead of going out to play. "Get some fresh air, it's good for you." I didn't want to. Fresh air was fine for other kids, but I could breathe just as well in the house as outside it. Naturally, Mom wasn't impressed with my logic, I lost all those arguments, not in my house. In my house, you didn't argue if you

valued your life; you nodded, muttered (very silently, I might add), and did what you were told. And hindsight, of course, tells me now that getting that fresh air, playing (usually with my brother), and hanging around wherever we hung around in those days, was indeed good for me.

Lionel Fenn is my fresh air today.

I work a long time in the Dark; most of the year, in fact. And while I'm in the Dark, intense is probably the best way to describe what I do, how I work, and how I think whether I'm physically writing or not. I deal almost exclusively with people's souls and minds, I deal with their nightmares, their horrors, fantastic or otherwise, and their day-to-day struggles just to survive. And at the same time, I'm also dealing in some ways with myself, my own horrors, my own nightmares, my own struggles.

Just as you do.

Eventually, however, it begins to wear emotionally; eventually, no matter how pleased you are with the results when the last page is done, you have to get up, get out of the house, and get some fresh air; launching straight into another world of horrors is not only impossible and debilitating, it's a terrifying prospect.

Fresh air; I need fresh air.

I didn't used to believe this, years ago in my callow youth, but I am a convert now: if you stay solely in the Dark, you stagnate. You may not be able to see it, but you become repetitive, working the same territory over and over because, since you still can't see it, it's comfortable. It may not be pleasant, but it's what you know. It's safe. And safe, to someone who writes dark fantasy, is about as dangerous as things can get.

There's a good chance that you will, like the black widow's mate, be consumed, and you won't understand what happened until it's too late.

Growth requires not only maturity, it also requires experience; and the only way you're going to gain experience is by getting fresh air.

For some, then, fresh air is lit-

erally that.

For others, like myself, it's getting as far away from dark fantasy as you can. In that regard, the distance all depends on you. Is science fiction of any stripe that different *in your particular case*? Then write it. Mysteries? Non-fiction? Porn? Screenplays?

Remember the litany: a writer writes.

For me, that includes not only walking around Oxrun Station and northern New Jersey, it's also standing in the shower the other night and muttering/singing: "My name is Joe Bill/I'm from Lousian; I grow my prize roses just as fast as I can. (thump thump . . . bump bump); I drive a big

Mercury for Montegue Howe/bringing tourists to the Manor for Zergo-pha chow (bump bump . . . thump thump)."

Inevitably, if you're still doing what you like, the fresh air can't help but improve your craft, or your experience, or your dealings with your characters/plot/etc. in other areas. In the case of this rap song, I imagine the influence will be incredibly subtle (lord, I hope so); in the case of the books themselves, the influence is already evident in that, when I return to the Dark, I am refreshed, I'm eager, I'm sick of breathing all that healthy stuff outside my window, and I'm ready to have a different kind of fun.

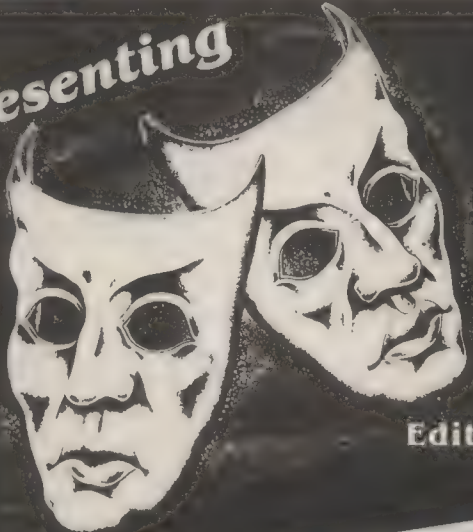
Not to have fun is, to me, the true horror of what I, and you, do.

The day writing stops being fun is the day I hang it up.

When the excitement dies, then so do I.

[postscript: for those interested (per-
versely or not) in the silly and ludi-
crous, not to mention the rest of the
Joe Bill Rap, *HAGGIS* is the news-
letter to which I alluded earlier. It's
\$12.00 for a 5-issue, bi-monthly sub;
\$3.00 for a sample issue; checks pay-
able to me or The Kent Montana Fan
Club, P.O. Box 97, Newton, NJ 07860,
and if Monteleone can do this self-
promotion stuff, why the hell can't I?
(thump thump . . . bump bump)]

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THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CRAZYFACE

JEFFREY OSIER

JEFFREY OSIER has earned quite a reputation as an extremely literate writer with an ultra-bizarre imagination (sounds like a young Clive Barker). His fiction -- he's also quite an artist -- has appeared in *Borderlands*, *Deathrealm*, *The Horror Show*, and other publications. "Crazyface" is his first appearance in *Cemetery Dance*.

Sometimes he stood at the mirror, rehearsing the expressions with which he held his face together, pressing his palms and fingertips into the soft flesh as though afraid that just one moment of inattention would send his sweet secrets blooming out for all the world to see. What he saw there was bland, invisible, and the expressions he rehearsed were . . . *expressionless*. In all the world, Roland told himself, *there is nothing quite so nondescript as me*.

He would move quietly through the living room and kitchen, his ears and leg muscles intent on every creak of the boards beneath his feet. Of course, all it took was strength and sensitive ears to train himself to be perfectly silent. If he could walk in hardsoled shoes over this warped old plank flooring without making a sound, then he could do it anywhere, upon any surface -- in the presence of *anybody*.

Silent and invisible. Sometimes Roland felt like mist, moving through the tangled, pungent configurations of his apartment under the power of his quiet breathing alone. But he was never quite successful; out *there*, eyes still met his, heads still turned to note his passage, unfamiliar doorways groaned or jangled when he stepped through. But he was getting better all the time.

Meanwhile, as though in compensation, the world just kept getting louder and more crowded, making it all that much easier. The more congested the crowd, the less he touched as he passed through.

Like mist.

Of the three windows that lined the wall of his living room, two gave an intimate, detailed view of the brickwork on the building next door. The other, the one closest to the bathroom, peeked around the front of the building next door to reveal a single streetlight. During the day, the minutiae of city detail -- the storefronts across the street, the people, the grit that seemed to be part of

the air itself -- all crowded the streetlight out of existence. It was there if he looked for it, yet it obstructed nothing and was the most insignificant detail in the entire scene. Roland spent most of the daylight hours sleeping off his waking excesses, but would sometimes spend an hour at a time sitting at his stained, infested table staring out the window, marveling at the brightness, the cluttered, purposeful mystery of it all, but never noticing or even acknowledging the existence of the streetlight.

But night was different. The storefronts across the street were dark, there were rarely people out wandering and nothing like starlight or moonlight ever penetrated as deep as this neighborhood. The drone of traffic, voices, stereos, and elevated trains would fade into isolated, intermittent noises. At night, the streetlight was *all*. Its light obscured nearly everything beyond it; it turned the wall of the building next door into a scarred field of blue flesh and filled the silence of night with a steady hissing, cut with pops and whispers. Directly beneath it was a circle of sick yellow light, usually empty, but occasionally circumscribed by someone -- or *something*.

Sometimes he would try to will a connection between the circle of light in the street below and his apartment. He would look out the window while moving his hands over the tabletop and the refuse that accumulated there, as though his palms and fingertips were orchestrating a blind dance of microscopic beings that swarmed through the air above the lit sidewalk. Something on the table -- an old, half-empty glass with lily pads of mold floating in it, a string of raw, fly-crowded meat, a small mutilated doll -- would blindly find a way into his hands and he would attempt to conjure its form or something its form suggested, onto those dancing, illuminated cells below.

But nothing seemed to work.

He shut and locked the bedroom door, then spent the next fifteen minutes at the bathroom sink, washing the stain and smell away. When he stepped up to the pot on the stove, the strands of meat were gray and the surface of the water was yellow with frothing grease. He reached into the boiling water with his bare hand and pulled out a chunk of meat. It was as tasteless as it was

colorless, but as he bit into it and began to chew, the trace odors on his fingers filling his nose, his tongue, his saliva. He swore and spit the meat back into the water, and then looked at the blisters on his hand and wrist, marveling at how neatly they blended in with the milky bubbles he'd pulled off the surface of the water.

His stomach hurt. He sat at the table, grabbed a plastic doll and began peeling its head apart like a blooming flower, one puncture through the skull for each shooting cramp in his gut. As he finished shaping the head into a fleshy blossom, he looked out the window.

There was a ragged, nearly shapeless figure sprawled across the sidewalk, only its head and shoulders propped off the ground and leaning against the base of the streetlamp. Roland looked away, concentrating on the flower-petaled head as he pressed it back into shape, resealing it with a smear of hot candlewax. The doll's reconstructed face was crooked and broken, its babyboy smile stretched and twisted into an insane, gaping pit of cruel intensity.

Then he looked out the window again and studied the face of the ragged man beneath the lamp post. Their faces -- the doll's and the street beggar's -- were nearly identical. Roland went to the window and pulled it open with his free hand, the other still clutching the doll's body. That hideous face beneath the streetlamp, too wide and distorted, the mouth a brutal gash revealing a cavernous darkness beneath, was turned upward. Both mismatched eyes focused directly on him, the twisted, smiling mouth hinting at a horrible knowledge and intimacy.

Roland looked at the doll, leaned out the open window and hurled it at the figure below. He watched as it descended -- too slowly for all the strength he'd put into it -- and disappeared into the sprawl of brown rags that covered the beggar. It didn't land on the man so much as it seemed to *sink* into him, slowly but completely, like a body swallowed by quicksand. The man did not move and his expression did not change as Roland leaned out further and stared a little deeper into that disturbing face.

He knows. Oh, god-dammit, he KNOWS.

Roland shut the window, returned to the kitchen pot and stood over the gray, toughening meat, wondering if he dared deliver any food into the raw, fiery pit of his stomach.

He next saw the crazy-faced beggar beneath the streetlamp three days later, in broad daylight on a loud, crowded Saturday morning. The malevolent expression stretched across his fragmented face was lost in the glare of sunlight, but the green-white slickness of his skin was enhanced by the natural light, as though the flesh had just been squeezed from a tube.

No one noticed the beggar. People seemed so oblivious to him -- even though he blocked half the sidewalk -- that Roland was amazed that no one actually *stepped* on him in passing. Not even the small children,

their own faces passing so close to the beggar's, turned as they stepped over his raggedy legs.

And the beggar didn't seem to notice any of them, either. He had eyes for Roland alone. They never strayed from his window, the accusing, unblinking stare so intense that even after Roland stepped away from the window, he felt as though the beggar could still see him.

Roland moved in nervous fits and starts about the apartment, cleaning up shredded fabric, things that had decomposed and desiccated into the cracks between the floorboards, trying to straighten up all the things that had accumulated on the desk and tabletops, things he could not throw away and so merely stacked in what he convinced himself were meaningful patterns. But it did no good. When he returned to the window, that ancient creature was still sprawled on the hot summer concrete, his jagged stretch of mouth silently shaping the depth of Roland's fear, of Roland's crime.

When he slept at all, Roland slept on the brown, cushionless sofa in the living room. The size of the sculpture made it impossible for him to sleep safely, comfortably or guiltlessly in the bedroom any longer. It was all he could do to fit through the narrow opening of the bedroom doorway.

Once the sculpture had been nothing more than an amusing configuration of bones: a femur, a tibia, a lower jaw connected by globs and streaks and strands of colored wax, super-glue, webs of rubber cement and fleshed over by chunks of children's modeling clay. He would sit on the mattress, thoughtlessly chewing away on a piece of boiled meat, staring at his little piece of artwork -- the only art he'd ever created in his life -- and wonder what would happen if he tried to make another, using other types of bones -- because, of course, there were so many different types! -- and so, what with the frequent influx of new ones, he tried again, and again. He sealed the bedroom window shut then, and just let the sculptures grow.

But that had been a long time ago -- so many bones, so many cans of rubber cement and blocks of clay ago -- at a time when he'd had no idea how many there would eventually be. Soon the sculptures filled the bedroom. He arranged them like beautiful, impossible organisms, some of them no more than a foot high, others reaching nearly to the ceiling. One day while Roland was at work -- cooking at Huddlestons, a small diner on Fullerton, just east of Lincoln Avenue -- the tallest, most precarious of his pieces simply collapsed. But it didn't scatter. It didn't smash apart any of the other pieces. Instead, it spread over several smaller sculptures, converging them all into a form that Roland found so breathtakingly complex and beautiful that all he could do was place strategic sinews of clay and cement to ensure that the accident stabilized itself.

And so, eventually the sculptures merged into a



single organism. A *super-* organism.

Now it was not only difficult getting through the door but nearly impossible to move through the room other than on his hands and knees. He had no idea what the sculpture looked like in its entirety. There was no vantage point from which he could see that picture, only a thousand cramped positions from which to watch the way it broke up the overhead light, the way the ribcages and skull fragments and metacarpal bridges repeated themselves in the shadows on the walls and ceiling as he swept it with the beam of his high-powered flashlight.

He was more proud of this creation than anything he'd ever done, yet he really couldn't show it to anybody. How many times had he carried a severed head into the room and given it a long-winded tour? How many times had he sat at a favorite vantage point, flashlight crammed into the head's open mouth, telling it the story behind the sculpture?

So many years, so many supplies and so many gray, overcooked meals had gone into creating his masterpiece. He sometimes wondered what would happen if he were to be turned out of his apartment or if -- impossibly enough -- some maintenance man were to come inside. But it was just a way of trying to frighten himself. The nice thing about this apartment, about the whole building, was that *no one cared*. No one looked, listened, no one wanted to know. It was probably the same in many other buildings. Crowded together in such dark, tiny apartments, connected by narrow, even darker corridors, people guarded their privacy with militant, obsessive passion. He'd lived in the building twenty years and had never once seen the neighbors on either side of him.

Once though, someone had broken in. Roland had returned to hear a low, weak moan emerging from the bedroom. He opened the door and crept through the latticework of bone, following the deathsounds, confused for a moment and disoriented by the thought that he'd added the pieces of someone not quite dead to the sculpture.

It was a young man. A boy, really, probably no more than sixteen years old. He was suspended three feet off the floor, the jagged edges of a dozen broken and sharpened humeri and tibiae piercing his body, a ribcage surrounding his crushed head. It was almost impossible to believe that the boy was still alive, but the moaning, weak and involuntary as it was, would not stop. Roland held his knife before the body, but could not bring himself to touch it even with the blade. Somehow he felt cheated, *circumvented*. The boy already belonged to the sculpture, and Roland's part in the creation had been side-stepped completely.

There was never any smell of decomposition. When he finally had the nerve to re-enter the room and look at the corpse again, it was almost impossible to find, as though the boy and his persistent moaning had been *absorbed* into the sculpture. It was weeks before he was

sure the sound was really gone. By then he began to wonder whether it had ever happened at all.

Violence didn't disturb Roland. It was just another messy but necessary bodily function. But the inexplicable appearance of the boy's body always haunted Roland. It had been an event that, as the years passed, seemed to take on more and more significance. Up until now, it had been the most discomforting experience of his adult life.

But that had all changed. The beggar beneath the streetlamp would not go away. Every day, every night, never moving, never averting or even shutting his eyes, the ragged man was there, rooted defiantly into a world that seemed oblivious to him, his attentions tearing away at the threads that held Roland's life and his peace of mind together.

Roland had been unable to go on a carving since first sighting the beggar. He would take the back exit out of the building at all times now, bringing him out into the alley so that he could avoid having to pass the streetlamp. There were times when he couldn't bear to look out the window, when he feared going *near* the window because he couldn't stand the thought that the beggar would see him. And yet, no matter where he went in the apartment he felt as though he were being watched by those glazed, unblinking eyes.

But a month passed and the man would not go away and Roland felt the need to go on a carving more and more each day.

In the end, it was an easy decision. The moment he decided, he wondered how he could have possibly gone so long without having the nerve. He had been unable to bear the scrutiny of this creature -- he would simply confront and kill him.

It was his dream that freed him of the fear. In it the sky was clear but there was a fog billowing up from rusted vents that cut jagged paths across the streets and sidewalks. He stepped up to the crazy-faced beggar, knifeless but hungry, only to discover the man's flesh to be almost unbearably aromatic. The beggar breathed in loud, gasping wheezes but was otherwise silent and motionless. Roland knelt before the beggar and wrenched him to pieces with his bare hands, feeling the steaming flesh cool as he held it to his face.

It was late on a wet Tuesday night when he prepared himself to confront the beggar. The rain had just stopped and the streets were empty. Aside from the pops and humming of the streetlight, the city sounds were no more than a hushed drone. Roland left his front room light on, neatly folded the plastic-lined laundry sack, sharpened his favorite carving blade and left the apartment.

It doesn't matter who he is, whether he's just a symptom of my own deteriorating faculties or an innocent, broken man with a face twisted and frozen into a

perpetual but unintentional glare. If I can just pretend that he's no more than another wet bag of artist's materials and submerge him into my web of bone, then the threat, the pressure, will dissipate. I'll pop those accusing eyes and boil them gray.

Behind the apartment doors lining the hallway he caught snatches of hateful or soporific music, laughter or crying or shouts laced with mundane, ineffectual obscenities. *So small and so tender. How can you not love them?*

Did anyone -- even the janitor -- ever travel this back stairway? In the beginning, so many years ago, it hadn't been this dark and deteriorated. The bulbs had hung bare from knotted cords, but the lights had at least worked. Now the back stairway was in almost total darkness, and the path down to street level was littered with pieces of wall and ceiling. The air was pungent with the sweat and feces of rats. He could hear them skitter out of his path, leaping to and from the holes in the wall. Sometimes one would brush up against his leg. But the rats were alone here. The back stairway was a forgotten place, and sometimes Roland wondered if maybe, having staked such a desperate claim on it in the beginning, it had simply ceased to exist for the other residents. There were times when, leaving the building through this passageway, the darkness seemed to fill with bright, vivid images: configurations of flesh and bone, the impossible geometries of life he sought to simulate behind his closed bedroom door, the perfect organism that he could never quite recreate when expanding and modifying the sculpture. But as he dragged a body up the stairs later, those haunted, vivid images would have disappeared, so that when he returned to the apartment only the habits of his craft remained to inspire him.

Tonight would be no different than any other. The kill would be silent and quick. The body would be carried up the pitch-black stairway in the laundry sack, something Roland had trained himself to do so that it looked as though it weighed no more than thirty or forty pounds -- a sack of freshly cleaned laundry -- in the unlikely event that someone actually saw him in the hallway. Would he be able to make an obligatory meal out of the old beggar, or would he merely strip the flesh away, cook the life from it and then dump the gray, odorless remains into a heavy-duty trash bag and into a backstreet dumpster? Either way, the face that glared with such crazed, hideous arrogance at him would be reduced to nothing more than a skull.

But when he stepped out of the alley and onto the sidewalk, there was no one under the streetlight. Just two minutes before the beggar had been stretched out there, as immobile as he had been for the past month; now he was gone. No pools of filth marked his wake, not a single trace to indicate that anyone had ever been sitting there at all. Just the uniform stain of fresh rainwater.

Roland ran his palm carefully over the cement

where the beggar had sat, then around the base of the lamp post as though something there -- warmth or maybe even abnormal cold -- would betray the old man's presence. Not even his imagination could provide the evidence.

He looked up at his front room window. Strangely, from this vantage point the most obvious feature in the room was the glass bowl surrounding the ceiling bulb, something Roland had barely noticed in his two decades in the apartment. Beyond that the only visible features were the molding that separated the front room from the kitchen and a corner of the table at which he'd sat so often, just watching the people, the traffic, the patterns of clouds in the sky -- and the sprawled, crazy-faced beggar. He glanced at the bedroom windows. Nothing but darkness. There wasn't enough detail there to show what caused the darkness, nailed boards or thick black curtains or the darkness of the room itself.

He surrendered to an inexplicable urge to crouch at the base of the lamppost to see how much better or worse the vantage point would be from just a few feet lower, but it seemed to make little or no difference. *What must I have looked like up there? Just a silhouette in the window, a dark shape against the yellow-lit ceiling?*

Suddenly a shadow moved across the room. Someone was up there -- someone walking around in the living room of his apartment! Roland gave an uncontrollable shriek, clenched the knife-handle beneath his shirt and ran back into the alley.

He didn't bother to lock the alley door behind him, just ran up the stairs as quickly as possible, not even aware that he'd pulled the knife from under his shirt so that the blade was swinging freely as he stormed down the hallway towards his apartment door.

The living room was empty and undisturbed. He searched closets and cabinets in dark corners. No one.

Then he noticed the bedroom door. *No, I didn't. I'd never leave the bedroom door open even a fraction of an inch.*

He took a step towards it, then heard a noise. A voice? The creaking of feet across the floorboards? No, it was more like a long, painful groan. Roland thought of the boy he'd found impaled on the sculpture and wondered if yet another had been lured into his sculpture's labyrinthine claws.

He pushed the door wide and swept his flashlight through the maze of bone and clay until the beam came to rest on the smiling beggar's face. Roland let out a weak yelp and stepped back, then forced his way into the room, his face impassive and his knife in front of him, gleaming in the beam of light.

"What do you want?"

The beggar smiled and shook his head. After seeing that face for so long, frozen like the features of a photograph, it was appalling to watch the misshapen expanse actually twist and contort into a readable facial

expression.

"You're a very talented man, Roland. Did you know that?"

"I asked you what you want."

The beggar, so large and shapeless beneath layers of rags, moved effortlessly through the tangled bone-scape, examining the sculpture and turning back with an occasional smile. How could he walk through there without bending or stooping or squeezing? He was at least twice as wide as Roland.

"I'm just looking. That's what you want, isn't it? A little credit for all the years you've put into this?"

"I think you'd better leave." *NO! How can I let him out of here? He knows what this is, where it all came from. I can't just let him OUT of here.*

The beggar laughed. "Make up your mind, Roland."

"I said I think you'd better leave, and I mean it. NOW."

The beggar stopped and turned towards him. "Roland, don't you recognize me?"

"Yeah, I recognize you. You're the one who's been sitting under the lamp post. What do you want with me?"

"And that's it, is it? Sitting under the lamp post? Doing what? Are you sure you just weren't *seeing* things?"

"Maybe I'm seeing things right now. But I don't think so."

"Snap out of it, Roland. You've worked too hard to be holding yourself in the way you have. We both know what you think of that world, of the people you watch out the window, all those people whose food you've spit and flicked into at Huddleston's all these years, all that fodder good only for the beauty of their bleached and stained and painted bones. Why do you worry so much about them? Why be such a *secret*?" His grin stretched so wide that rags of flesh seemed to split apart in its path. "It's because in the end you really don't think you're any better than a thousand senseless murderers, killing because they're prisoners of their own brutal childhoods or because it's the only way to scratch that itch or pop their wads?"

"WHY then? You explain it to *me*."

"*Transfiguration*, Roland. You can't remake the world. If you're very, very lucky you can refashion a tiny corner of it. But not you -- what you've done is refashioned *yourself* and made a world of it. *A world out of yourself*." His large, twisted hand spread through the tangle of bone and rubber sinew.

"And that's what you think this is?" Roland demanded. "Some kind of big, artsy self-portrait? Shit! You give a good speech, you know that? For a second I actually thought you knew what you're talking about."

"The fact that I'm here at all indicates that I *know*. You don't want to be a better human being, you don't want to be superhuman. You want to be something

completely *other* than human. There's more life in the fingerprints you leave on this modeling clay than there ever was in the bones the clay now surrounds. It bleeds in summer when it gets too hot, stiffens and cracks in winter. The ghosts in your fingertips seep into the clay and the clay bleeds into the bone. Haven't you figured it out yet? You haven't left this room in years. You're trapped in here, willing yourself a circulatory system, and the shapeless, ugly little man that comes in to attend you is just a tiny part of your soul, begging God for a few more pieces of bone."

The beggar turned away and began to step through a narrow archway of clustered rib. Roland watched as the ribs meshed into a gleaming, orderly fabric and then expanded, parting to allow the man's passage.

"WAIT!"

The beggar stopped, smiling, his hand resting on the fleshy surface of the arch, which appeared to be breathing and twisting itself awake from a restless sleep.

"Who *are* you?"

The beggar laughed. "You don't know? How many people have you killed, Roland? My God, you have an archway in that corner that must be made from at least forty pelvises! Have you ever been afraid of a single one of those . . . people? Have you ever *really* been afraid of someone coming in and finding all this? No? Then why are you so afraid of *me*? Why didn't you carve me the first time you saw me, if I was such a nuisance? Because when you look at me, you see what you really *are*, the way others see you -- just a projection of yourself that the mirror refuses to show."

"Ridiculous!"

"Really? Don't think *too* hard about it, Roland."

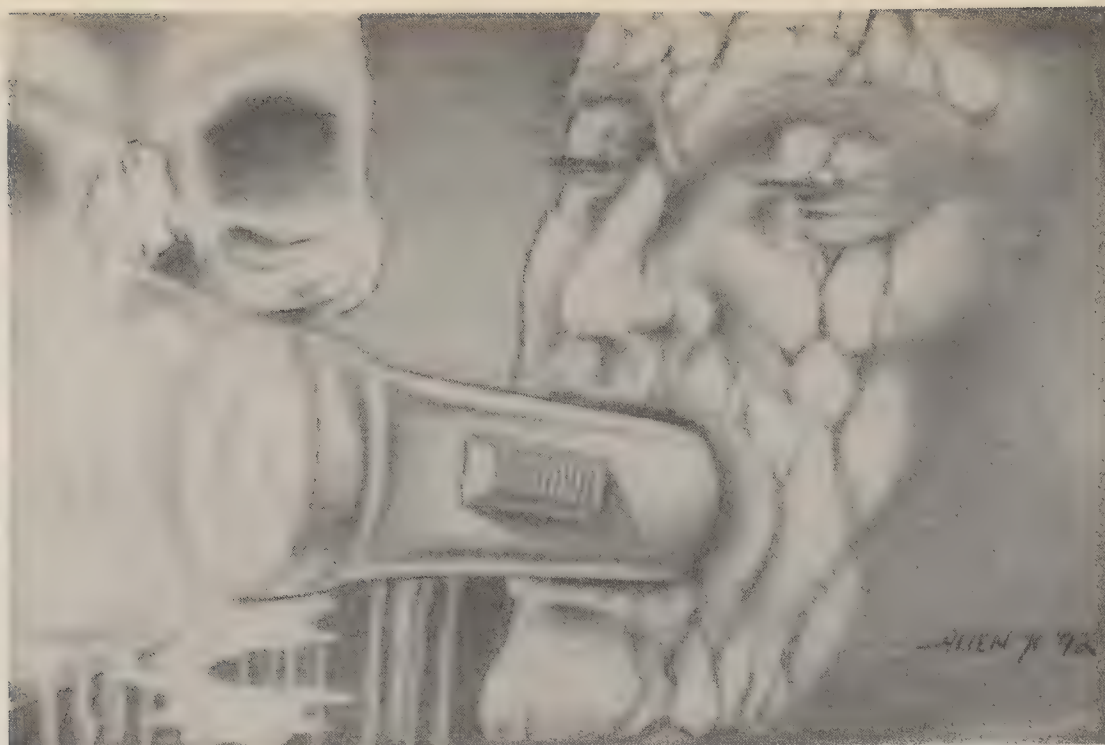
Roland felt something brush against his back. He whirled and saw a gigantic appendage, a complex weave of bones, held together precariously with super-glue and too brittle to be moving so freely and with so much force. It rose as if to block his path, but Roland hit the floor and crawled out of the doorway as the appendage twisted and the whole room began to quiver and groan.

And *speak*.

He ran down the corridor and into the darkness of the back stairway. The groaning followed, the clutter at his feet reaching and slashing at him as he leaped and stumbled down the stairs. Every exhaled breath came out as a shuddering whimper, to which a thousand swarming rats at his feet responded with chattering laughter.

He crashed through the alley door and collapsed into the rubble. When he rolled over and looked behind him he expected to see *something* in the doorway -- a swarm of rats, the beggar, the winding, segmented appendage that had tried to block his escape. But there was only the door, hanging at an awkward angle, its lock and top hinge broken and splintered away from the frame, and the darkness beyond it.

Roland wandered the streets until daylight, his



hand occasionally drifting into his jacket pocket, groping for the carving knife. When had he dropped it? In the apartment? During his frantic, awkward retreat down the back stairs or in the alley? Every time he saw someone emerge from the darkness, he reached for the knife, kept his frightened eyes on the person as he made a conspicuous detour to avoid any contact. *I have no weapon and no bag and nowhere to go but home . . .*

Near dawn he passed a thin black man standing with eyes shut in the shadowed recesses of a doorway. The man opened his startled eyes at precisely the same instant that Roland first saw him. They were no more than two feet away from each other. Roland let out an audible gasp as he quickened his pace.

"Hey, Raggedy-boy! What the hell's *your* problem?" The man's laughter bounced off buildings, filling the empty, silent streets, ricocheting after Roland and searing his ears.

It was mid-morning by the time his fatigue and hunger drew him back into his own neighborhood. He had been gone for at least six hours, long enough to convince himself that the whole thing had been a dream. He had only to walk into his apartment, avoid the bedroom, collapse onto the cushionless sofa and fall into a sweet, cleansing sleep. When he awoke the whole experience would be no more than a hazy half-memory.

Roland decided to go into the building through the front door. He couldn't bring himself to face that broken alley door, the pitch black stairway and all the familiar but untrustworthy spectres his mind had been planting there for years.

There was a group of neighborhood kids lounging

about the front entrance, smoking and talking tough and intimidating everyone who passed by. Roland had been forced to deal with hundreds of kids just like these over the years. A few of them had ended up carved, but for the most part he had left them alone, and they had left him alone.

But now they seemed different. From half a block away they noticed him, turned towards him and then just . . . waited. As he approached, Roland saw the smiles on their faces grow bigger and . . . *hungrier*. The current leader, a tall, slender Hispanic boy, took a step forward.

"Hey, Crazyface. What's the word, man?"

Roland almost turned to look behind him. *Are they talking to me?*

The boy obviously meant to block his path. Roland tried to swerve past, but the boy stepped in front of him, actually dared to *make contact* with him.

Roland looked up, his hand once again groping into his pocket for the carving knife, his face calm and opaque.

"Hey. Crazyface. I'm talking to *you*, mother-fucker." He poked at Roland's ribs with a long, dirty finger, and the rest of the kids laughed. One of them collapsed to the sidewalk, holding his sides as he howled joyfully. He wasn't more than thirteen years old.

"Yo, Caraaaay-Z-face!!" one of the girls chimed in with a mockingly seductive voice.

The leader had a grip on the arm of Roland's jacket, but Roland shook it loose and worked his way through the tightening crowd. He had to push his way against each and every one of them, while they all laughed and called him by that same name. *Crazyface, Crazyface,*

hey Crazyface, you want me to stick my dick in your big mangy rag-mouth? Hey Crazyface, where's your smelly bag of rotten meat? Hey Crazyface, what the fuck is your hand doing in that pocket? Whatcha got behind that bedroom door, huh Kirazzzyf-f-f-face?

He took the front steps at a run and fumbled his way through the locked inner door as quickly as he could. There, in the dark, shabby lobby, was a cracked mirror. Roland stepped up to it and looked at his reflection.

It was the beggar's hideous face. He reached up and touched his chin. It felt just as it always had. The hand stroking his face was his hand, but the face in the mirror was not the face he'd spent his whole life molding and nurturing and protecting.

He climbed the stairs with slow resignation. In the time it took him to reach the second floor he understood exactly what awaited him, knew that the beggar had been right, understood for the first time what he had been striving towards all these years, felt the fear and doubt to which he'd blinded himself in the meantime. *Killing simple, insignificant little animals. Playing handi-crafts. Pretending I'm an artist*. It was so easy to lose oneself in the surface feel of *process*, in the joy of habit and the perfection of minor physical skills, so easy to forget -- to never realize in the first place -- the all-important urge: to escape, to outgrow, to . . . what was the old man's word for it?

He spent a minute in front of his locked apartment, dreaming of the ignorance that possessed other people when they passed this door. It was a tempting, delicious ignorance that he'd never before considered. No sound leaked through, none of the odors of life and death, none of the glorious images he'd spent all these years molding. It was just another apartment door, no different than any other. Behind any one of these doors could be . . . entire deviant universes beyond imagining.

He swallowed again, unlocked the door and stepped inside.

It appeared to be trapped. The front third of it had squeezed through the bedroom doorway. The molding was cracked and hanging, the plaster was cracking, and the great superorganism was twisting and rocking, trying to scrape through without tearing away all of its new flesh. There was blood everywhere, warm and steaming, flowing from the grasping, undulating, flagellating tangle of appendages and archways that struggled and turned to greet him. The clustered skulls, molded over and glued into so many un-head-like forms, had grown new eyes, new tongues, and they lapped up the blood from their own torn flesh and turned to him with wild, hungry smiles of greeting. Every one looked like him. Like Roland. Like Crazyface. Like all those nameless souls who'd gone into the construction of this great being, this *Super-Roland*.

He inhaled deeply. All that blood, his blood, smelled so sweet, so tempting.

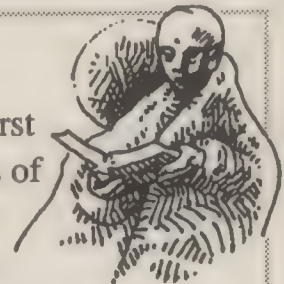
It needn't have grabbed him. It needn't have impaled him -- through the cheeks, the neck, the chest, the abdomen and crotch with all those ribs and finely crafted femurs. He'd have gladly planted himself. He knew the posture, had seen and heard the ritual once before, many years ago. There was a moment of pain, but less than he'd expected. He felt the life leak from him as a tangle of mighty arms raised him towards the ceiling. He hoped that the darkness wouldn't last too long.

When he looked up there was only a bundle of half-familiar clothes and some gray, wilting flesh shrinking into them. He pulled the rags down and passed them deep into the tangles, where a hundred grasping hands tore them apart and a hundred mouths laughed in good riddance.

He gave it one more good try. The wall gave way and it hardly hurt at all. The flesh was healing and spreading, the bones were brewing blood far faster than the walls could scrape it away. He didn't marvel at how naturally the anchors now served as legs and feet; he merely used them to walk the rest of his labyrinthine body into the front room, where he sat, staring at the row of windows, waiting calmly for the strength to punch through, waiting for the sky to grow dark and the streetlight to burn bright.

-- CD

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ED
GORMAN

GORMANIA

Re: The care and feeding of our heroes.

I sold my first novel less than six years ago yet in that relatively short span of time, I've met many, if not most, of the writers I long ago took as my heroes and heroines.

For example, a few springs ago, my wife and I were having lunch when the phone rang. A man's voice said, "Is Ed Gorman there? This is Ray Bradbury." I'd phoned him a few weeks earlier about a story of his I wanted to reprint, and he was now returning my call.

Bradbury is my wife's favorite writer. She quickly (and telepathically) figured out who I was talking to and went into a kind of frenzy. Think of all those shots of teenage girls watching the 1964 Beatles and you'll have some notion of what Carol looked like.

I said to Bradbury, "Ray, there's a grown woman here making a complete fool of herself over you." The three of us laughed. I carry that image of Carol with me constantly, a mental snapshot. She was so purely cute and exultant just then. (I was just as exultant but even at my age I'm still trying to be cool so I kept it to myself.)

In my time as a professional writer, I've met or corresponded with,

among others, Dean Koontz, Philip Jose Farmer, John D. MacDonald, Evan Hunter/Ed McBain, Bill Pronzini, and Dorothy B. Hughes. People for whom I have particular admiration (another way of saying this is people from whose work I've stolen whole bunches).

Some of these people I was in touch with only briefly. Others I became good friends with.

Now, the people I've mentioned have at least two things in common. They are/were all quite successful writers, people of major repute and sales. And they hear regularly from people who remind them of their importance in the world of popular fiction.

This column is not about them. Instead it is about another group of writers I've gotten to know over the years, the next tier down, or even the next few tiers down, writers most of us are familiar with but who have not been huge successes commercially. These people are reminded only infrequently that they have played a role in the development of American storytelling.

Shortly after my first novel appeared, a mystery novelist in his later years wrote to tell me that he liked the way I'd combined the hard-boiled style with the traditional British structure. This was a man I'd

grown up reading. I was flattered by his words and decided to take advantage of the phone number he'd enclosed.

I called him in the middle of a sunny midwestern morning and was troubled to find that he was already in the bag. He didn't quite know who I was at first but finally he went, "Oh, *Rough Cut*, you did a damn good job, kid."

And he then, without pause, began telling me what a bunch of spoiled little bastards my generation was. "All those dollars, kid. Hell, my crowd didn't even dream of dollars that big."

He didn't stop there. He went on to tell me that not only was my generation spoiled, it was also short on talent, manners, and the respect it paid its elders -- i.e., all the older writers it had ripped off. (About that, he wasn't kidding. Nearly everybody I know has borrowed heavily from this particular writer.)

He talked himself into a kind of lynch law speech. He wanted to hang somebody, and fast.

This went on until I couldn't take the rage or the bitterness any longer and found some excuse to hang up (as I recall, I think I mentioned the UFO that had just landed in my back yard).

Two days later he called back.

Being an ex-drunk myself, I recognized both the pain and the patter. He had called because he couldn't quite remember what he'd said -- but he had this terrible feeling that he'd been belligerent, maybe even insulting. I assured him that everything was fine.

We are today, good friends. About half the time we talk, he's drunk and angry; the other half, he's quietly funny and almost shy. When he's in this mood, I tell him, in all sincerity, how much his novels mean to me, and what a debt my generation of suspense writers owe him. Sober, he's one hell of a nice guy.

I have another friend, a younger version of the man I just discussed.

This friend is convinced that you can take the standard elements of the mystery story (as defined by Edgar Allan Poe) and transmute them into literature as the professors define it.

Before I began writing, I read a half dozen or so of this man's stories and found them very, very good despite a certain sad air of slumming. He is obviously happier writing for the quarterlies than for the mass market.

But I studied his stories and learned from them. His boldness gave me courage. I did a story called "Dancers" while still very much under the sway of his work, and not only sold it for good money but saw it bought and produced as a one-act play.

He gets wonderful reviews. But his books sell lousy. Real lousy.

He differs from my older friend in one key way. He doesn't need booze to be bitter or angry. Rage accompanies him wherever he goes.

I usually hear from him just after he's been told that somebody he particularly loathes got a big advance. He's pure venom.

There's only one way I can get him back down off the ledge. I start telling him how much his stories mean to me -- sometimes scene by scene. And because he hears in my voice

how moved or amused or scared his tales have made me, he slowly starts feeling good about himself again. Not great -- and not for long -- but at least he's gotten some respite from his self-contempt. A few minutes is better than nothing.

An old paperback writer died last year. He was very big when Gold Medal was very big. He wrote a lot and saved his money and was able to live a decent middle-class life long after the boom died.

But as his wife told me, he was utterly forgotten. He would read novels or see movies that had obviously been inspired by his own works ... yet nobody ever wrote to say hello, or thanks to your books, I'm a writer today myself. I knew her husband very well and knew she was telling the truth. He had influenced a hell of a lot of writers my age but most of us didn't write to tell him so.

Before he passed on, I was able to help bring three of his best books back into print. He wrote to tell me that he spent half-an-hour with the three books in his lap, just looking at them and hefting them and even smelling the paper and the ink. He hadn't had a book in print for eight years.

I know all this sounds awfully altruistic but it isn't. I'm just doing for others what I hope others will someday do for me. I doubt I'll ever be a star but I hope that, in my dotage, I receive at least an occasional letter from a young writer saying that he learned something from reading me. I'm a big believer in karma, which is why, when I've lost my temper and done something nasty, I expect bad news very soon.

The care and feeding of our heroes?

I know it sounds a little idealistic but I'm not the only one who practices it.

Read a Stephen King interview sometime. He frequently talks about writers who've influenced him. And he does so with real enthusiasm, too. You can imagine how good

those writers feel when they come across such reference to themselves.

This kind of payback holds an almost religious significance to me. Writing is human continuity, generation unto generation taking the same storylines and themes and impulses and changing and updating and reshaping and redefining them.

There are, of course, those older folks who make it impossible for me to repay my debt to them -- the anti-semitic that I just finally gave up on; the sly old codger to whom I kept mailing checks that he only spent on alcohol; the bitter woman who talked all the time about what bitches and lousy writers all her friends are.

It's an imperfect world, to be sure.

But right now, there are at least ten elderly suspense writers poised to shuffle off. They never had the big sales, they rarely won the big awards, they seldom got the major reviews. But when you look in the anthologies, and study a lot of the 100 Most Important Novels lists, you see their names again and again.

This kind of acknowledgement becomes more important as, year after year, the backlist fades in most of the chains. I found several Daltons without a single Raymond Chandler title. I didn't find one book by Theodore Sturgeon. When I asked the clerk about *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, I just got a blank stare. *Mirror For Observers*? *The So-Blue Marble*? Huh?

A new generation of readers needs to be disabused of the notion that private eye fiction began with Robert B. Parker and that Louis L'Amour invented the western form and that the docu-drama was discovered by James Michener.

As I said, fiction is human continuity. From time to time, we need to honor that truth.



T. LIAM McDONALD INTERVIEWS CHARLES L. GRANT

PROFILES IN TERROR

SHADOWPLAYS: THE DARK FICTION OF CHARLES L. GRANT

He's known by a lot of names: Lionel Fenn, Geoffrey Marsh, Simon Lake, Timothy Boggs (sense a trend here?), Deborah Lewis, Felicia Andrews, Steven Charles.

Oh yes, and Charles L. Grant. That's the name he was born with. We think.

He has been nominated for and won so many writing awards (World Fantasy Awards, British Fantasy Awards, Nebulas, Hugos, Stokers, etc.) that it's hard to keep track of them all. At last count he'd sold ninety books. He is the premier horror anthologist in the history of the genre, weighing in with over two dozen collections of original horror fiction. The subtle influence he's exerted on the course of the genre in the past two decades will probably never truly be known, but the young and unknown talents that he discovered and fostered will continue to leave their marks in the realm of dark fiction for a long time to come.

But Charles Grant is still relatively unknown outside of the fantasy/horror community. He is living proof that talent and quality and per-

severance and the respect of your peers don't always lead to wider fame and bestsellerdom. For as long as he's written, Grant has stuck to his guns and written *his* kind of fiction, a fiction of moods and atmosphere and subtlety and characters and slowly building tension. *Quality fiction*. But his career begs the question: does quality fiction sell to horror readers? When someone decides to pick up a scary book, what do they expect? What do they demand of it?

There's the rub: the issue of Grant's career has not been one of delivering what the consumer *expects* of horror fiction, but what Grant *demand*s of fiction.

It's gotten exceedingly difficult for me to write about Charlie Grant. Several years ago I took up the task of playing James Boswell to Charlie's Samuel Johnson, and of all the people I've interviewed, I know him the best. I edited the anthology *Shadowplays: The Dark Fiction of Charles L. Grant* (forthcoming from StarmontHouse), solicited essays and appreciations and reminiscences, compiled a painfully long bibliogra-

phy (in the dictionary under "prolific" it should say "see Charles L. Grant"), and spent many, many hours interviewing him. He lives up the road a stretch, and I see him pretty frequently to watch dumb movies with our respective spouses. (Author Kathryn Ptacek showed an astounding lapse of reason when, in 1982, she agreed to marry Charlie, and then moved to New Jersey (really!) from sunny New Mexico.) I know that he wears Daffy Duck slippers around the house, drinks warm Dr Pepper, smokes Trues, follows pro-wrestling and The Giants, and actually owns movies like *Killer Klowns From Outer Space* and *The Stuff* and *Chud* (I and II) on laser disk. I know that he has two children, Emily (age thirteen and a dead ringer for Mariel Hemingway circa 1976) and Ian (sixteen and he doesn't look anything like Mariel Hemingway), and two ex-wives (the less said the better). I also know that the schedule he keeps would kill a man half his age, writing obsessively as he does for hours on end. Kathy has found him still at the computer at 8:00 am after an all-night stretch.

Last year he wrote seven books under a bewildering variety of pseudonyms. There are writers of lesser talent who haven't written seven books in twenty years.

All of this says a lot (well, *something*) about Charles Grant as a person, but little of him as a writer. Is the man who rejoiced when Rick Flair left World Championship Wrestling to join the World Wrestling Federation (thereby insuring a match between Flair and Hulk Hogan) the same man who wrote the Oxrun Station novels, edited *Shadows*, and is a proponent of "quiet horror"? Absolutely, and this aspect of his character becomes more clear upon reading the Lionel Fenn novels

(particularly those in his current "Kent Montana" series) or *Haggis* (the newsletter of the Kent Montana Fan Club, which Grant writes and publishes). It is here, amid bad puns and in-jokes, that we see the *true* Charles L. Grant.

Charles L. (for Lewis) Grant was born September 12, 1942 in Hackensack, New Jersey, the son of Father Sydney Grant and Minerva Grant. Charlie's dad was an Episcopalian priest: a position that brought with it a certain level of expectations for the Grant children (Charlie and his brother Jack). "Next to the Catholic priest," Charlie recalls, "my father was the most important man in town. I had to behave myself, and I did.

There was no thought of rebelling. Not like my kids have done, or like ordinary kids do. The family was very Scots, very Old World, very strict. In my family you just didn't rebel. The most I would do is sneak cigarettes in the balcony of the Brandford Theater in Newark, and things like that. That was as far as rebellion went."

Though Charlie read voraciously and even wrote a little in high school (a monster book written to impress a girl he wanted to date... it didn't work), he didn't think of making a career as a writer. Instead, he decided to follow in his father's footsteps and become an Episcopalian priest. At Trinity College, he began studying for the priesthood, which earned him the nickname "Preach" and made him "a private freelance confessional" for his fellow students. But, ultimately, it wasn't meant to be: "I was in the bathroom in the dorm one day, at the end of my sophomore year, and I looked in the mirror and said *You can't do this. This is no good.* I finally realized that I had to stop doing everything that my father did. My father was a big track star. He was in the Melrose Games, he won gold medals, all that jazz. Then I tried to do that, and I was *awful* at track. I always had wanted to be a teacher, but I figured that my father was a priest, so I'd be a priest. I know he was really disappointed when I made my decision, but he didn't say anything."

Ditching the Divinity program after two years meant he had to scramble to catch up, but he finally graduated with degrees in history and English, and went on to teach in various high schools throughout New Jersey. It was while he was teaching that he got caught up in a local writer's group, finally deciding this was something he could do himself. He began writing mainly for the sf market because, as he explains, "at the time that was the market to write for. The really popular literary magazines (*The Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *Liberty*, all those) were all gone or dying.

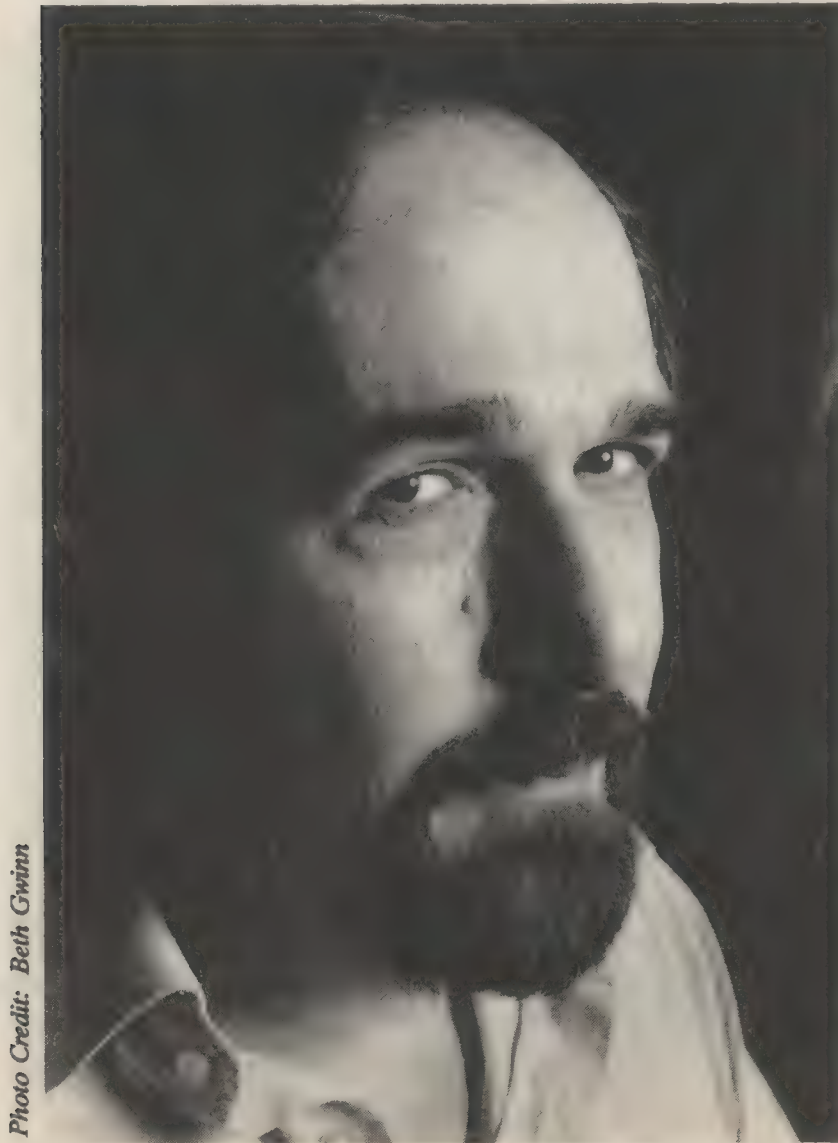


Photo Credit: Beth Gwinn

So I looked around, and in 1966 the markets were all sf." He wrote and submitted material for two full years before finally seeing an Edgar Rice Burroughs spoof ("The House of Evil") published in *Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine*. "I don't know how many stories I had written up till then," he says. "I had collected 112 or 116 rejection slips. Then one afternoon I had gotten home from school and I was reading Tarzan. I don't know which one it was, but Tarzan ends up swinging through the trees of West Virginia to save Jane from this forest fire. And just the style and the idea cracked me up and I went in and wrote "The House of Evil" in a day and just copied the style and sent it out."

The same month the story was accepted, Charlie was drafted and spent a two-year stretch with the Military Police in Viet Nam. He was shot twice. It was an experience he would write about three times ("Come Dance With Me On My Pony's Grave," "The Sheeted Dead," and "Confess the Seasons"), but otherwise doesn't talk much about simply because, as he says, "it sucked." The World Fantasy Award winning "Confess the Seasons" is about a vet whose experiences parallel Grant's own. The material in "... Pony's Grave" is also true: "The little girl in bed with the gold pins holding her chest together was in the hospital when I was there in bed. She never said a word the whole time she was there. The Viet Cong had done it to her. 'The Sheeted Dead' was like what it was to come home."

While in Viet Nam he wrote a few stories, which his wife would send around to publishers, but nothing sold. "My first experiment with the surreal was written while I was over there: 'In Donovan's Time' [published in *Orbit 13*]. I never really wanted to write about the war. A lot of people were doing it and doing it better, and it was just too soon. I might do some more in the future. Some memory will bubble up in my

mind and I'll connect it with something else and write about it."

After being shot for the second time, he was put into the Provo Marshall's Office, six months before being discharged. Bored by piles of paperwork, he began writing humor (something which would erupt into a full-blown career as Lionel Fenn). "They had all these forms with forty zillion carbons in them, and for some reason I started doing something called *The Figma*, which in army terms means *Fuck It Got My Orders*. In between doing office work, I just started making up stuff: an underground newsletter like *Haggis*. I would type it twice, which meant that there were eight copies. We'd pass it around, and try real hard to keep it away from the officers."

Once back from the war he took up teaching again and turned his spare time to writing. After being fired from a teaching position, he started to write full-time, cranking out five novels that would never be published. "Two of them would have been considered mainstream," he recalls "and they were bad. I don't even think I have the manuscripts anymore. Over the years they just became extra baggage and I threw them out. One of them dealt with a guy who was called Oslo Three, who was an ordinary Joe who had daydreams of being a hero. He finally went around the bend and decided to kill people. That's how the book ended. He never actually killed anybody so it wasn't a mystery."

"The other one was a book about teaching called *The Manual*. I keep trying to write that every so often, to redo it. I had read *Up the Down Staircase* [about teaching high school] and thought *This is not right. This is not the way it is. Not really*. It was going to be the *Catch-22* of the teaching profession. I don't know how many people that went to, but everybody bounced it. It was pretty bad. They were all pretty bad. Then I wrote a fantasy, and that was pretty bad. And a sf novel that actually

wasn't all that bad and almost sold, but not quite. The very first novel I wrote was sf. It's in a closet somewhere. It was okay, but I'm no good at science."

Of course, it was as a science-fiction writer that Grant got his start, his first novels being the first three books of a projected series known as *The Parric Family Saga*. "Luckily, I got into sf when Silverberg and Ellison and Sturgeon and others were leading the battle in favor of the so-called soft sciences. So I was okay there. Whenever I tried to get scientific then... forget it. I finally just ran out of ideas. It's really strange, because I didn't have all that many to begin with, and I got awards for what I did do."

The Parric Family Saga, which Grant charted out in the last published book (*Legion*) spanned 300 years and eleven more books, none of which saw print. The series was abandoned upon the rejection of book four: *Passages*. Grant found himself at the end of his science-fiction career, which was okay with him. By the time he burned out on sf, he was already selling horror anyway, which was his first love, in both books and films. "I read all the horror books I could get hold of, and saw all the movies. I tried to write mystery stories, but I never sold them. In a way, most horror fiction (mine, anyway) are mysteries: you've got a problem and you've got to figure out what's causing the deaths or the strange occurrences. The clues are all there, the reader either picks up on them or doesn't, and eventually the character figures it out. I realized I was getting into a rut there, especially in the short stories, because the main character would figure it out wrong, and that's what brought the kicker ending. He'd miss one vital thing, and then he'd get nailed for it. As far as real mysteries go: I've tried and I can't write them. I don't know why. Perhaps I don't have the proper mindset for them or I'm not imaginative enough."

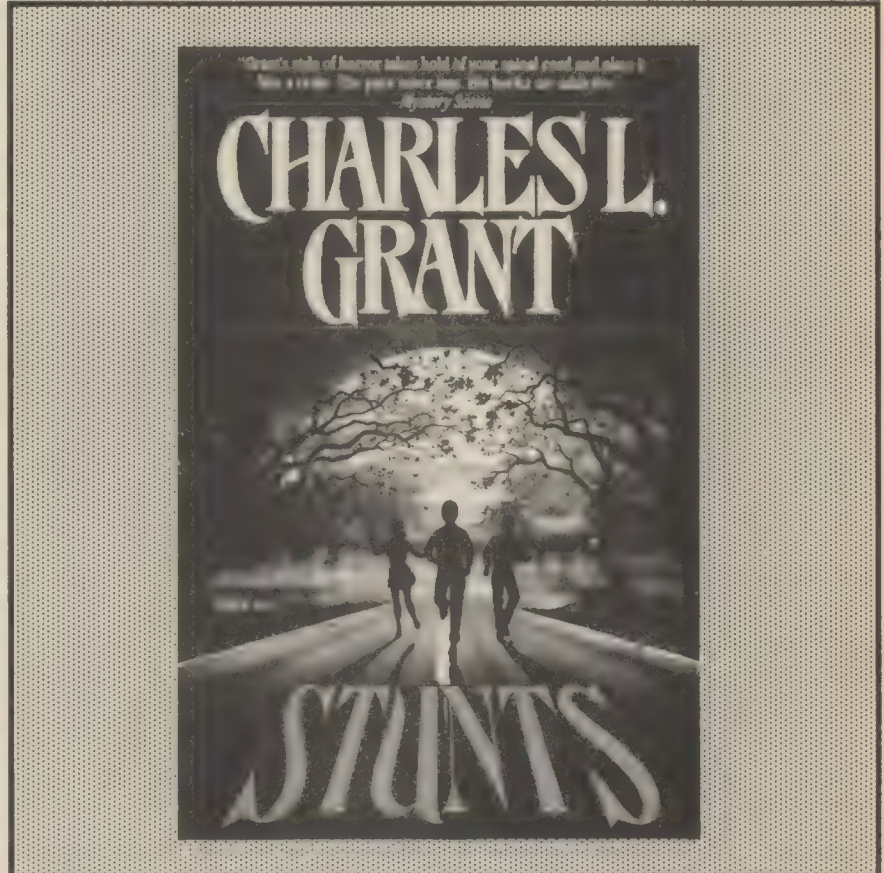
While writing the four science fiction novels, he had tried his hand at a horror novel with *The Curse*, which is so embarrassingly bad that Grant is willing to buy back any extant copies. The next time out, however, he knocked the ball out of the park. The idea for an atmospheric horror novel became fused with the perfect setting: Oxrun Station. Oxrun was arguably the first important horror town since Lovecraft's Arkham. Castle Rock was just a glimmer in Stephen King's eye when Grant created a town of infinite possibilities and unbounded strangeness. It would last for twelve books and a scattering of stories, and proved so fertile a landscape that Grant now regularly returns to it in the form of four interconnected novellas (as he did in the books *Nightmare Seasons*, *The Orchard*, *Dialing the Wind*, and the forthcoming *Black Carousel*). It is now the domain of some of his strangest, most surreal fiction, and *Dialing the Wind* certainly must have set some record for mindboggling surrealist imagery. As the sheriff says in *The Soft Whisper of the Dead*: "Things are different here. You want to survive in Oxrun, you've got to expect to be different."

Oxrun is in Connecticut, where Grant attended college; a location chosen for its New England background. "Oxrun Station (to use a god-awful contemporary analogy) in an upscale Arkham. In stories about these little towns in New England, the towns are always old or dying or falling apart, and it was mostly low-class and no-class blue collar. I changed that and made virtually everyone in Oxrun Station doing pretty damn well for themselves. It also gives them more mobility, so they can move around. They don't have to have steady jobs. It's based partly on West Hartford, which has got all the houses which are in Oxrun."

Oxrun Station also says a lot about Grant's own preferences and styles in fiction. As a small town, it is prey to small town horrors: something which Grant returns to again

and again. He explains why: "Small town horror is, in a lot of ways, more personal than urban horror. Even though a city is a collection of neighborhoods (and in a sense a collection of small towns), they're so close together, and so much happens all the time in a city like New York, or Houston, or LA, or Chicago, or whatever, that it deadens the impact. Except for the people in individual

Mourning) were all written for Doubleday's romantic suspense line, with their prerequisite women in distress and strange (though not graphic) frights. "When I wrote the first Oxrun books for Doubleday I was censored, but that was because most of the books in that line were sold to libraries, and they got certain ratings. So if books had certain words or scenes in them, the rating would drop and fewer



neighborhoods, death doesn't really have an effect on the city as a whole. If a guy gets killed up in Harlem, people down on Wall Street couldn't care less, and vice versa. In a small town when somebody dies, everybody is affected in one way or another. You either knew him or you knew the name or you've heard of them or something like that. I've lived in small towns all my life."

It's interesting to read the first five Oxrun Station novels chronologically. The first three (*The Hour of the Oxrun Dead*, *The Sound of Midnight*, and *The Last Call of*

libraries would buy them. Since I was just starting out it didn't bother me that much. I just thought it was dumb."

The style changed noticeably in *The Grave*, which (along with the last contemporary Oxrun Station novel: *The Bloodwind*) was done as a paperback original for Popular Library. He actually got to use words like "fuck" and have characters that had sex. It proved to be a liberating experience. "I went crazy. I also wasn't restricted by length, either. You were restricted by length at Doubleday. There could only be a

certain number of words. I was not allowed to go farther than, I think, 197 pages in theirs, which is about 75,000 to 80,000 words."

After *The Bloodwind*, Oxrun Station was left behind for Wyoming in *The Nestling*, a big book in many ways. It was a long, complex, multi-layered novel that scored his greatest success to date, and took Grant in a new direction:

"Since *The Nestling*, every book I've done has to be different in some way, whether it's major or minor. I give myself a challenge and I have to do it. I have been getting, over the years, a number of compliments on *The Tea Party*, for example. I had written that because I wanted to do a story about a house that was alive. Not a haunted house, not a possessed house, not a house cursed, but a house that was a *living thing*. I don't think I did it right. I'm disappointed with it. It just didn't . . . feel right. My kids helped me with a lot of the murders in it. At the time they were ten and seven. My daughter came up with the idea of the stone flowers, and my son came up with the idea of the stone grass. Or was it the other way around? My son is in that. I asked him: *Do you want to be in the book? You're going to die.* My daughter said no, she didn't want to, but my son said *Sure*. So the kid, Ian Baxter, in *The Tea Party*, that's my son. He thought it was great, he got squished by a tree."

Grant's next book took him in still another direction. *Night Songs*, were it not unceremoniously dumped on the marketplace by the publisher, could have further cemented Grant's ascension into the ranks of big-selling horror writers. Instead it, and *The Tea Party*, sunk into obscurity. *Night Songs* is not only a zombie novel ("real zombies," Grant emphasizes, "not the Romero kind"), but also his first use of his home state of New Jersey as a setting. "It's funny," he says, "but when I started with *Night Songs* I'd get a lot of static about putting things in New Jersey. *New Jersey? Horror stories in New*

Jersey? Are you kidding? But it's part of the popular perception of what the state is: over-crowded and oil refineries. The Turnpike view. That's fine with me. I want them to stay the hell outta here. I say *What the hell? If they can take place in New England, they can take place in New Jersey just as easily.* So just about every book I've done takes



place at least partly in New Jersey since then."

New Jersey would serve him well in his next novel: *The Pet*. Still hailed by many as Grant's best book, this story of a murderous "pet" horse conjured from the imagination of a put-upon boy (Donald Boyd) touched a nerve in a great many readers. Something about the way he dealt with his teenage protagonist (a good, average kid who becomes wrapped in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence) spoke to people in a new and challenging way. It even almost made it to film: Tom Holland (*Fright Night*, *Child's Play*) optioned it but later dropped the project when he couldn't figure out how to make a horse scary. (Really.) It was Grant's first full-scale exploration of a major teenage character, something he noticed that he "hadn't been doing. I think it's a way of further populating my own weird little world, expanding the types

of characters that I work with. I didn't do a lot of women in the beginning. The first three Oxrun books had women protagonists only because that's what horror had in those days and my agent told me I had to do it that way. I wouldn't have done it that way otherwise. But lately, female characters have had increasing roles as I become more comfortable with writing about them, and the same with the teens."

The Pet also broke Grant's year-long slump (the worst of his career), when he went for an entire year without a single sale. "I couldn't sell an article, a review, a short story, a book, I couldn't sell anything. I thought that was it, I was done. I had shot it all and now I was going to go back to teaching or go work in a supermarket or something. I really did. It was horrible. Absolutely horrible. There have been times where I think that what I've done isn't worth all the effort that goes into it. I'm afraid that I'm going to have to stop and get a 9-5 job. But once I started, there was no way I could ever stop. Retirement in this business just doesn't exist. If you're a writer you don't retire, your brain goes *Pffht!* or you die. Writers don't retire, Authors do. You're an Author when you're on a panel and you're showing off, or you're plugging your books. A writer is who you are when you're all by yourself up in your office or wherever it is you have your typewriter or computer or whatever, and you do the work. I always write. Even when I'm not writing I'm writing. I can't get away from it. I don't understand writers who can only work a couple of hours a day. They go out there and they do their work, and its 3 or 4 hours . . . and they stop. I can't do that."

Indeed, Grant is one of the most *driven* authors in any field today. In the time since *The Pet* he also turned out novels under the names of Geoffrey Marsh, Lionel Fenn, Simon Lake, and Steven Charles (more on this later), while keeping up the pace

of one horror novel a year (*For Fear of The Night, In A Dark Dream, Stunts, Something Stirs*). There was also a young adult novel called *Fire Mask* in there somewhere, published under his own name. Why all the writing?

"Because I can't write one horror novel after another," he explains. "It drives me nuts. When I'm done I'm washed out, because for me they are very emotionally intense. I can't go from finishing one to starting another." Instead, he now spends his time between horror novels writing the humorous adventures of actor and Scots baron Kent Montana in a series of novels that pretend to be nothing more than B-movies in print. This, of course, is the natural result of Charlie having seen thousands (literally) of bad movies. Kent got his start in *Kent Montana and the Really Ugly Thing From Mars*, followed in swift suit by *Kent Montana and the Once and Future Thing*, *Kent Montana and the Reasonably Invisible Man*, and his latest: *The Mark of the Moderately Vicious Vampire*. Up next: a Cthulhu Mythos parody called 668, *The Neighbor of the Beast*, in which the Evil Book (*The Bingomomicon*) and Great Cthulhu himself must be thwarted.

He also spent about three weeks writing the novelization of Bruce Willis' *Hudson Hawk* debacle while wearing his Geoffrey Marsh hat. Let's not talk about it.

He is now embarking upon a new series of young adult novels under the name of Simon Lake. The series is called *Midnight Place* (a street located in Grant's mythical town of Ashford, New Jersey, setting of *The Pet*) and is actually his second attempt at writing young adult novels. The first was the *Private School* series, published by Archway under the name of Steven Charles. They didn't exactly mark a high point in his career: they were so radically (and badly) rewritten by the editors (Byron Preiss, Inc.) that Charlie pulled his dedications and totally disacknowledged the books. He won't

even sign copies of them if asked. Several years later, still burning from his treatment by Preiss and associates, he is trying again with *Do You Believe in Demons?* (from Bantam next October), *Snowsong*, and *Black Rider*, all in the *Midnight Place* series.

All this, from one man.

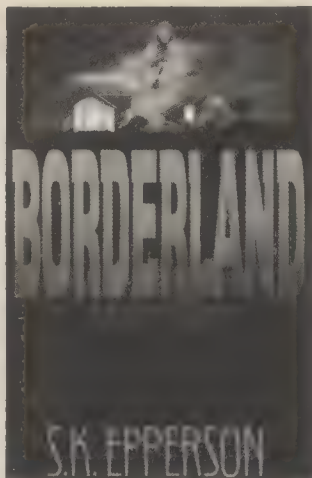
And always, there is the horror. His kind of horror: quiet horror. Now don't make the same mistake that many in this field do who equate "quiet horror" with "conservative horror." They are very far from being the same thing. As I said last issue in this column about Ramsey Campbell (who is certainly now one of the "Old Guard"): he is far less conservative than most of the younger talent. The same goes for Charles Grant. He's no reactionary old fool sitting around lamenting sex and violence in literature and turning out prissy little "spooky" tales for anemic old ladies. His fiction is some of the most daring



horror being published. His point is more one of style and approach: "To describe these things in extraordinary detail doesn't make the violence any more real if the characters aren't real, and if the characters are not real, then it's gratuitous, and it's not going to have any effect except to repulse somebody. If that's the effect you're after, well, that's okay, I guess. I just don't do it that way.

"When you learn the limit, you know how far you can go to engage the reader's imagination, then you don't have to go any farther than that. As I've said before, there is nothing, *absolutely nothing* more powerful than the reader's imagination. And I don't give a damn what *anybody* says, this is true. The trick is how far do you go to engage the reader's imagination, and then let the reader do the rest of it. I had a letter from a woman in Montana who had read *Night Songs*, and she chided me for a terribly graphic scene where a zombie pulled off the arm of a cop who was sitting in a car. That's *all* I said: *She pulled his arm off*. The woman who wrote to me filled in all the details of the skin and the blood and the white bone hanging out of the flesh. I didn't put that in there, but it worked for her. This is what I mean. You go so far in your description of the violence that is happening, and you don't need to go any farther, because the reader's imagination has kicked in, and filled in whatever bothers them the most, and therefore makes the scene effective. If it's the blood, they'll fill in the blood; if it's the sight of white bone hanging out of red flesh they'll put that in. If you have to describe it in detail, including the bone, the flesh, the blood; what you're trying to do is hit all bases and I think that's a waste of time, it's a waste of effort, and it's a waste of talent. If you *don't* have the talent to do it, then all the graphic descriptions in the world aren't going to make a damn bit of difference.

"Now I'm being called 'the old conservative horror writer,' one of the old guys who don't know shit. I kind of liken the trend towards explicit violence to the New Wave movement in science fiction, which I was a small part of. These guys come up with things they want horror to do, just like the New Wave movement did. What the field will do is take what's good from the so-called Splat-terpunk movement (which does not exist) and throw away all the garbage, and we will all be enriched for



BORDERLAND

A Novel of Terror

"This latest Kansas gothic from a hard-working Epperson (*Brother Lowdown*, *Dumford Blood*) features a truly monstrous town -- Denke, Kansas -- whose main industries are kidnapping and theft and whose leading amusements are rape, murder, and cannibalism . . .

"The variety and sheer number of threats to her unlikely heroes take Epperson way over the top; the second half of this witches' brew reads like the most exhaustive catalogue of atrocities since the glory days of the Marquis de Sade."

-- *Kirkus Reviews*

S.K. EPPERSON

*Author of Brother Lowdown
& Dumford Blood*

it. I believe this. I also think that calling me old and conservative, and probably artsy-fartsy, only makes me laugh, because when I started out I called the guys that had been around for a while old and conservative and artsy-fartsy and thought they didn't know shit and had lost touch with reality. It's not unlike 'real' life, where youth rebels, and brings in the best of what they've learned. These guys will do the same thing. There are a few in there who don't have a tenth of the talent of Skipp and Spector or Ray Garton that get books published, and they'll go away with yesterday's trash."

And if that's not enough, one need only turn to *Dialing the Wind*, or *Stunts*, or the forthcoming *Raven* to see how a whisper can be more provocative and terrifying than a scream. Here, Grant is at his most violent and most strange, and he certainly isn't conservative. If we are to equate "conservative horror" with reactionary horror (and certainly they are the same), then Grant is as "liberal" and anti-reactionary a horror writer as we have now. He is never satisfied with the old forms, the old techniques, the old assumptions and moral values and tricks and boogeymen. He is constantly pushing the envelope, going a little further with each book. The limits of genre? There are none: "I can only speak for my own genre. I can't speak for anybody else's. As far as mine is concerned, there are no limits. (I sound like Clive Barker!) But there are no limitations, because there are too many different kinds of horror. You run all the way from *Red Dragon* (which is a horror novel) to *Dracula*. And there's an incredible amount of space in there to do a lot of different things. The neat thing about lasting as long as I have, and I don't know how I have, I really don't understand it . . . but the neat thing is that so far I've been able to survive (touch wood) all the shake-ups, and I don't know why. But the older I get, the less tolerant I get, and I don't give a damn.

"I write for myself. (My agent will tell you that I never write for the market, and that really annoys him.) I figure that if it gets me, it will get someone else. I don't think about the market, my agent thinks about it. I just write the books. I say *Here's the idea for my next book* and he says *humpf* and I either do a proposal for it or, if I can afford it, I do the whole book, and he sends it out."

Charlie knew that his next horror novel (*Raven*) would be so unusual that he'd have to write the whole book. Nobody would buy it on a proposal. Almost all of the story takes place in a single room with eight characters, in real time, with no chapter breaks. The story came to him with such fury that he wrote a hundred pages in three days, working sixteen hours a day, then collapsed. Working from a single image (a man in a black duster standing in the snow with a shotgun), he forged a tale about the human capacity for violence. It is his first overt handling of his long-standing view of "civilization and the savage":

"I do not believe in 'sophistication.' It's vaneer. We are all, as evidenced by anything you see on the news or read in the newspapers, still savages. We have not risen that far from the savage state. What we have done is put on sophisticaion like we put on clothes; but any human being, in any given situation, is perfectly capable of savagery. It doesn't make any difference who it is or what kind of person it is. There is the so-called sophisticated person and the so-called savage. Now if you want to call that good and evil, that's okay. If you believe in God or you believe in some sort of pervasive good, you can't *not* believe in Evil. There's a duality in everything. As far as an evil entity, a Devil, no, I don't believe in that. I've never written a religious-based story or book. I don't conjure demons. Not because I don't believe in them, but because they spring from a base which I do not believe in, which is Satan. I don't believe it's Evil so much as it is savagery. Any person,

put in an aggravating situation with someone they just cannot stand, will sooner or later say *I'd like to kill him*. You wouldn't go out and do it because there are all the constraints of society. But at the time you said it, *you meant it*, and that's scary to people who like to believe themselves to be above that sort of thing."

Grant's views on good and evil are also clearly evident in his major influence: Nathaniel Hawthorne. To Hawthorne, with his closet full of witch-burning ancestors and a Puritan ethic he just couldn't shake, evil was a very real, tangible thing. It was a balancing power, a threat, a force necessary if there was to be such a thing as "good." Grant clearly admits Hawthorne was, and continues to be, an influence on his work: "I'd like to have written 'Young Goodman Brown.' The fact that I'm getting more surreal these days is from a conscious effort to tell a story in the way 'The Minister's Black Veil' was told, in that there are no easy answers for anything. If there is an influence, it is Hawthorne, and maybe Ray Bradbury."

Like all writers, he eventually found his own voice, that style and technique which makes a Charles L. Grant book unique. His tastes carried over into his anthologies, beginning with *Shadows*, continuing in a quartet of books edited for Playboy, and finding its focus in the first horror "shared world": Greystone Bay. Now he has come to the end of an era. *Final Shadows* (a massive collection published by Doubleday) caps off that series, and *Greystone Bay 4* will see the end of the strange hamlet of Greystone Bay. The anthologies finally became too much work (two dozen in fifteen years), and the decent material began to dry up.

Now Charles L. Grant "just" writes, and writes, and writes. He writes about a Scots baron trapped in plots from all the B-movies ever made. He writes (sometimes) about a tailor from New Jersey who gets caught up in wild adventures while searching for lost artifacts. He writes about the teenagers from a strange street and the horrors they face. He writes about fear and darkness and the dangerous human impulses that fol-

lowed us up the evolutionary ladder. He writes what he likes to read, and he likes to read so many different types of fiction that we will certainly see more strange books from more strange pseudonyms. Next year he'll be fifty, and he's not slowing down a bit. He's probably writing more now than he ever has in his career. This is Charles L. Grant: a man of many voices, and talents, a man who directed the course of horror for a solid decade, and will continue to for many years to come.

This column is compiled from approximately seven hours of recorded interview material (and a great deal of unrecorded conversation), a small portion of which appeared in The Horror Show, and most of which will appear in (in question-and-answer format) in Shadowplays: The Dark Fiction of Charles L. Grant (Star-mont House). Thanks to Dave Silva, Charlie Grant, and Kathy Ptacek. For information on subscribing to Haggis, see Charlie's column elsewhere in this magazine.

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BRIAN HODGE has appeared in *Cemetery Dance* twice before, and in most of the genre's major anthologies. His novels include *Nightlife*, *Dark Advent*, and *Oasis*, and *Deathgrip* is due this Spring from Dell/Abyss.

The carnival had no name, which to Tim seemed the saddest thing of all. Not the wheezing rides, nearly as broken down as the people who ran them. Not the pitiful sideshows. Not the way it had blown into Rawlins like a summer tumbleweed at the mercy of Kansas winds. *It didn't even have a name.* As if it had given up trying anymore, and was merely slogging through the motions.

Tim and Mia went anyway, a break in the routine which had shackled them. In Rawlins, you could date for a week and cover all the options. After three years, love damn well better be the thing that keeps you together, because it wasn't going to be a smorgasbord of new experiences to share.

"You hardly see these places anymore," Tim said as they strolled hand in hand along the midway. Buzzing lights assaulted them, and the sickly sweet aroma of cotton candy. Young kids swarmed in search of their parents, begging for one more quarter to beat the game, any game, they just *knew* they could beat it this time. The gamerunners watched with knowing smiles that hid sharks' teeth. For they knew better. "That seems kind of depressing."

"One more symbol of childhood bites the dust," Mia said.

"Were they always this tacky when we were kids?"

"Sure. But tacky was magic then." Her arm tugged at him and she snuggled closer, grinning. "Grow up and face the real world."

No problems there. The real world had intruded on the carnival like the barrel of a shotgun, blasting a duck from the sky. The place was just waiting to die.

They got corndogs impaled on sticks, then challenged each other at the shooting gallery. Tim crapped out on the tennis ball versus the soda can pyramid. They hit a few tent shows next, and it took them to the far edge of the carnival. And here they found it.

The tent was large, as tent shows go, with a bleakly faded rectangle of ancient canvas draped across the front. *JOCKO THE FIGHTING CHIMP*, it read. Beneath this unassuming legend had been painted a large

hairy beast which could have rivaled the Mighty Kong in ferocity. The chimpanzee's muscular arms were raised in attack, or perhaps undisputed victory, and its face was twisted into a savage grimace baring sharp teeth and red gums. A barker with a beergut as round as a barstool lifted a squawky megaphone to his mouth and repeated his spiel once again.

"See Jocko the Fighting Chimp, right here in this tent!" he crowed. "Ladies and gentlemen, you won't want to miss this classic battle between man and beast! Only a dollar!"

"Give it a try?" Mia said.

Tim shrugged. "Probably just some geek in a monkey suit."

"And you think the Man With Three Noses back there was real?"

"Let's do it."

Tim slipped the barker a pair of ones, and the man paid little mind to the cash. His eyes lingered over Mia, her long legs and the bare midriff beneath a front-tied blouse. She pretended not to notice.

"You better cover the little lady's eyes, bub," said the barker, winking with bourbon breath. "This ain't for the faint."

It was arranged like a miniature circus tent within, a few rows of bleachers sagging along three sides. Filthy sawdust covered the ground, and in the center of the arena stood a large cage, perhaps thirty feet long by nine high by twenty wide. Empty so far, but with doors at each end.

Tim and Mia took seats up one set of bleachers, and he scanned the rest of the audience. Larger than he would have imagined. Most were men, bunched in pairs or small groups, and looking as if they all shopped at the same store specializing in shabby work clothes. They whooped, hollered, slapped each other on sweaty backs. Tim felt suddenly self-conscious. Maybe this was their kind of show, but he doubted it would turn out to be his.

Movement . . . The canvas wall rippled on the far side, the empty side, and a flap parted for a few seconds. Dying sunlight fell through as a dark and hunched figure shambled in, all arms and legs and fur. An emaciated old man quickly followed, holding the muzzled chimpanzee back with a leash. In the same hand he carried a thick cane. His right sleeve was rolled up and pinned at the



shoulder. No arm to fill it. They entered the cage through the door at their end, stood waiting in a corner.

"What was that about a geek in a monkey suit?" Mia asked.

"So I missed a call this time. It happens."

"Uh *huh*." He got the feeling she was accusing him of missing a lot of calls lately.

A few minutes later the barker came in and stood by the cage. He had exchanged his visor for a top hat; the beer gut was the same. So was the megaphone. As he lifted it conversation fell to a buzz.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Tonight you have come to see Jocko the Fighting Chimp. But this is your show and we need your help." The bullhorn's treble cut like a razor. "We need just three or four brave souls from the audience. Three or four with enough guts to face Jocko in the heat of combat. It costs a mere five dollars to step into the ring with Jocko. Only five! But . . . beat Jocko and you'll win fifty!" He pulled a worn green bill from a pocket and held it aloft. "Yes, beat him by fair means or foul. Rest assured that alllll is safe. Jocko *has* been muzzled and a skilled trainer is on hand at all times."

At which point this so-called skilled trainer tipped back to snort from a flat-backed bottle, and the barker gave him a dirty look. Away went the bottle.

"Yes, five for fifty, five for fifty, any takers, any takers?"

The buzz of conversation swelled, sprinkled with laughter. The barker stood patiently, as cocky as he could manage with a belly of its size. No doubt ready to browbeat the audience for its cowardice and goad a few knotheads into overamping their testosterone.

But there was no need. The audience had coughed up three.

Tim looked at Jocko. He sat on his haunches in the corner, motionless, staring straight ahead. Then he began picking through the sawdust and Tim noticed some sort of leather gauntlets covering the backs of his hands. Probably to prevent him from using his fingernails. Tim recalled reading that a chimp's nails were nearly as strong as steel.

"Is this for real?" Mia whispered.

"I guess so."

And he wondered . . . How could they get away with this? Such a show wasn't going to rank high in the eyes of the SPCA. It seemed logical that a sheriff or someone would come down hard on them over it. Then he recalled a movie he had seen. *Carny*; Jodie Foster, Gary Busey. All about the laugh-a-minute life of selling your soul in a travelling carnival. One of its lessons was that a simple bribe could let you bend quite a few rules, as long as nobody got hurt or fleeced too badly. Money makes the world go 'round.

The fifteen dollars was collected. Music came over the loudspeakers, rhythmic drums and jungle noises, strictly Tarzan cartoon soundtrack material. It remained

low and ambient while the first contestant stepped into the cage.

The trainer unhooked Jocko from the leash and, with his foot, gave him a tiny shove. Jocko sauntered out to size up his first opponent. The fellow was tall and thin and awkward-looking, with ears like halved funnels. He grinned at the audience and scratched his armpits and hooted. One more testimonial in favor of Darwin.

Jocko had apparently seen enough. In one fluid move, the chimp leapt up to grab the bars of the cage roof, then swung forward over the fellow's head. Jocko reached down with an impossibly long arm to slap the back of his head, sending him sprawling through the sawdust. The crowd roared laughter as the guy picked himself up, shook his head, and brushed sawdust from his pants. Jocko plopped to the ground like a furry frog and waited.

Undaunted, the guy rushed forward. Jocko went up to grab the roof again and let the guy pass underneath, then dropped behind him and goosed him. One more nosedive into the sawdust brought more laughter. Defeat was conceded; the guy grinned sheepishly and walked from the cage.

Warrior number two stepped in, considerably less confident than when he had first come down minutes before. Tim wondered if chimpanzees could smell fear. Perhaps. Jocko charged, thumping the man's chest with a blow heavy enough to buckle his knees. As he staggered backward, Jocko pressed in, reaching with long, wiggling hands that played havoc with his clothes and hair. He couldn't vacate the cage quickly enough.

The audience was laughing harder than ever, and even Tim was joining in. So far, so good. If the show merely consisted of watching a few blue-collars with macho hangups get their pride trampled under hairy feet, then more power to it.

Sucker number three was easily the shortest of the trio, but overcompensated with muscle. His T-shirt fit like a latex glove. Hands on hips, he walked a few steps into the cage and stopped. Staring straight into Jocko's face. Not blinking once. Staring.

Staring.

Challenging.

The crowd noise fell to a hush, for obviously something was going on within the cage that was anything but the norm. You could tell it from the chimp's sudden nervousness; he wasn't used to this approach. Jocko moved one way, then another, creeping forward a little at a time. Only his opponent's eyes moved, following. The tension was acid, eating away every last trace of the playful mood of moments before. Jocko had to feel it too, and he stopped before the man, as if unsure of what to do.

Don't just stand there, Tim willed the chimp. *Do something*.

If the message was received, it was by the wrong one. It had been a long time since Tim had seen anyone move so quickly. The man swung at least twice, catching

Jocko full in the face with both fists and wet smacking sounds. Jocko staggered back, tottering on one unsteady leg. The guy punted with his foot to send a blizzard of sawdust into the chimp's face, eyes, nostrils. Jocko wiped furiously at his face, and Tim swore he could hear a muffled little scream, unable to make it past the muzzle. Another flurry of punches sent Jocko to the ground, rolling over and over, until he came to rest on his back. His belly rapidly rose and fell with his breath.

The audience surged to its feet. Applauding, cheering, screaming. A new hero had been born from its midst. Tim felt sick enough, and his heart plunged even further when he saw Mia applauding and cheering along with the best of them, her hands overhead. He could not look at her.

The winner and champeen strutted from the cage, all flexing arms and machismo. He stood before the barker, palm out, waiting. The fifty was his, the barker none too happy to part with it.

Tim couldn't look at them, either.

In the cage, Jocko's trainer nudged him with the cane. One hairy arm moved weakly, feebly. And in that moment, the grizzled old man looked out at the crowd and Tim was certain he saw the sheen of tears in the man's eyes. Tears, but backed with rage. *He hates us*, Tim thought. *He hates every last one of us*. Tim felt a bitter comfort in that. For they all deserved nothing less.

He found himself longing to make some sort of eye contact with the old man, or that Jocko would roll his head over and see that there was one soul in the tent who wasn't cheering the outcome. That someone hurt right along with him.

But it was a pipe dream. The trainer simply hooked onto Jocko's foot with his only hand and dragged him away, leaving a trail through the sawdust that led out of the cage and beneath the canvas flap. Disappearing into the twilight.

As the calls for blood and victory went on.

••

"That bothered you tonight. Didn't it?" Mia had to speak very loudly to be heard over the background din.

"Yeah, you could say that. It was like something out of the Roman Empire."

Mia nodded, stroking his arm across the tabletop. "I know what you mean."

He laughed bitterly. "So where do you come off playing the outraged spectator? You were cheering just like everyone else."

Her gaze lowered to the tabletop and he saw polarities warring within her eyes. Weighing her options in how to handle this, their latest disagreement. Acquiescent remorse, or confrontational, which would it be? When she looked up, he knew Mia had opted for the latter.

"What's the big deal, anyway?" she said. "It was just

a show, Tim. *A show*. That chimp is probably used to it."

"Used to it, huh? Just like, oh, say, some poor woman married to some three hundred pound slob who loves his Budweiser and World Championship Wrestling gets used to him slapping her around now and then? Because that's the way he tells her he cares? Sorry, I don't buy it."

Mia looked askance. "Great. He's comparing women to chimpanzees now." She went on the offense with luminous eyes. "We're talking about a dumb animal here. That's all. Just a little demonstration of man's superiority over an animal."

Tim had to laugh again. "Superiority to an animal that's been muzzled, that can't scratch with it's nails, and is totally out of its element. That's *really* impressive."

She huffed, and Tim saw the tactical switch in her eyes even before she reopened her mouth. "Let's not fight. Please? We came here to have a good time."

Tim nodded, his white flag on the wave as well. *We came here to have a good time*. In theory, at least. Tim plunked down his drinking money here because the place was the least offensive to his sensibilities. Half the time the jukebox was wailing mournful twang and nasal lament, but half was better than all. Then there was the business of last visit, when some guy relentlessly hitting on Mia had cornered him into a fight. Never mind that Tim had sent the guy packing with two black eyes and minimal damage to himself. The fight was stupid to begin with. Needless.

But I didn't start it.

He had learned to fight early. It was either fight or die. Someone was always happy to instigate an impromptu sparring match. Didn't like his name. Didn't like his high grades in school. Didn't like that pretty-boy face. That voice. His clothes. The reasons were as easy as they were irrelevant. Some guys just seem born magnetic to fists. Most crumble. A few rise to the challenge. But he never provoked them.

Just as Jocko, come to think of it, never provoked his.

"I hate it when we fight," she said across a table puddled with rings from their glasses, sweating in July heat. "I just want us to be happy."

Tim forced himself to smile. "Me too."

But happiness was a crapshoot. Happiness depended on so many factors. Life's direction for one. He took in the aggregate of the bar's patrons. All seemed perfectly content to have been born in Rawlins, and to live, beget offspring, and die here. Tunnel visioned.

He thought back to his comment about the Bud-swilling wrestling fan who showed affection with the flat of his hand. And hated himself for thinking that if that was all Mia ever got out of life, she probably wouldn't be all that disappointed. Because at least it was secure. You knew what tomorrow brought.

That damnable need for security... It shotgunned

at least 95% of healthy risktaking before it had even come to fruition.

But Tim knew he couldn't point many accusatory fingers . . . even though the dream still burned within. *UCLA film school*. He had a closet full of self-produced short films which had convinced him he could make a go of it there. That . . . and a three-year-old letter of acceptance. Gathering nothing but dust.

So why hadn't he shaken Kansas' dust from his feet? The answer may have been scarier than the consequences. But at least he allowed himself to dream. More than Mia could honestly be credited with. Mia, whose body moved with a natural fluid grace that any dancer would kill to acquire. Mia, who could conceive of stunning choreography every time he shot footage of her and synched it to music.

Mia. Who wouldn't even entertain the notion of plying that talent somewhere else in the world.

Worst case scenario, a future shock vision he sometimes tormented himself with: Step one, settle into a *real* job, perhaps at one of the area oil companies needing fieldhands. Steady income, benefits. *Security*. They'd get married. Children, at least two. A house. A mortgage. Loans. Domestic squabbles and lethargic complacency. The amazing expanding waistlines and sagging breasts and weary eyes. He would end up tied down from countless directions, lashed out like Gulliver among the Lilliputians. Goodbye, California.

It was enough to frighten the piss out of him.

Mia grabbed her purse and excused herself for a few moments. He watched her cover the path between the table and the ladies' room. Watched the reactions brought from many of the guys along the way, good old boys pausing in mid-gulp to rubberneck and nudge each other in admiration. "Hottest piece of ass in Rawlins," someone said.

And then he knew.

She would never leave because, regardless of where it might be that she could refine herself to fit her potential, she would not be as special. For some, anonymity was worse than stagnation.

So what's my excuse?

Tim drank, awaiting her return. Letting his eyes rove. For some reason they lit upon a group of roustabouts in one corner, camped around a table overburdened with countless longneck bottles. Tim tuned in on their conversation.

" . . . greatest thing I ever did see," one of them was saying. "Somebody said that's the first time that monkey's been beat in years."

The guy who was talking looked vaguely familiar. A face from the past, no doubt. High school football hero turns to fat and a receding hairline over the next six years. An oft-repeated cycle.

"And tomorrow night I'm gonna make it number two," he proudly declared.

"Ahh hell, Jess. That monkey'll pluck your banana and swing from your balls," said one of his friends. It brought hoots of laughter.

"No way, man, no way!" Jess was adamant. "The guy had a technique. I watched real careful. He stood there and psyched him out! I was sitting there, and I'm thinking, *Hey, I can do that.*"

Jess' friends thought this uproarious. The table became a forum for rapid-fire cracks about how he was the man for the job, how the monkeys of the world were simply outmatched with good old Jess on the prowl. The matter died a quick death when the barmaid brought another round. Jess paid, and they toasted his impending good fortune.

Tim wasn't laughing. He just wanted to leave. And to feel ill all over again.

♦♦

The carnival after closedown was an altogether different world, alien and exotic and somehow a bit sinister. The rides, now still and dead of lights, lurked with the menacing poise of stuffed carnivores in a museum. Did they move as soon as your back was turned? The sideshows had become cathedrals devoid of their pilgrims, purged by local curfew ordinances rather than righteous crusaders.

And from the shadows, eyes watched the passage of one who was an outsider even though this town reluctantly had to claim him as one of their own. Because now, they were themselves again, they owed no one a good time. Madam Zolga had removed her scarf, and the Man With Three Noses had removed his prosthetics, and one and all had removed their facades.

Tim got directions on how to find Jocko and his trainer from a young man who could not have been any older than he, yet Tim had the sense of being around someone his father's age. The young man scrutinized Tim for moments that felt far longer, and finally told him which trailer in a voice scarcely audible. Only when he turned to continue on his way did Tim notice the bulbous red nose and wig in the fellow's hand.

It wasn't even a trailer, to be truthful. Just an abused old pickup truck with a wooden camper shell perched atop the bed. The door was open, a naked light bulb, forty watts at best, glowing within. Tim stood at the doorway for several moments, debating whether to knock or wait until the old man sprawled inside noticed.

The choice was made when the old guy raised his head and peered out. He grunted. An invitation? No way to tell.

"What's your business?" came a harsh voice from within.

"I'm not sure," Tim said, not moving. He felt ridiculous. "I was at the show tonight. I . . . I didn't like the way it ended."

"Didn't like it," the old man said, mostly to himself. Tim had the sensation of standing in the presence of some fallen guru, or perhaps a whiskey priest hearing confessions. "So you want to step inside while you decide, or go back home for that? Makes no difference to me either way."

It was as close to an invitation as Tim felt he was likely to get. The inside of the camper shell was no less dismal than the outside. Terribly cramped, nearly every square inch of floor space had been utilized. Crates of belongings, a mattress and box springs, more. The walls suspended aged pictures, forgotten people in forgotten times, the towns a distant memory. Except for one . . . a group shot of numerous men in uniform, and beside it, in its own little display case, a military medal. Nothing else looked quite like a Purple Heart.

"There's no place for you to sit," he said. The old man, every bit as grizzled as he had appeared in the tent, had the only chair. Beside him, as languid as an April afternoon, Jocko lay on the floor. Dried blood crusted one nostril, and unblinking brown eyes were fixed on Tim. "Unless you care to take the floor."

Tim's first impulse was no, but he reconsidered. And managed to find a bit of open space to fold himself into. *But why am I here?*

"Did you hear him, Jocko?" said the old man. "He didn't like the way things turned out tonight." Though he spoke to the chimpanzee, his eyes were also fixed on Tim. "So why'd you come here? Clear your conscience? Mmm? Tell me how outraged you were to see something like that?"

Tim swallowed. His throat felt scratchy dry. "Something like that, yeah. Seemed like a better idea before I got here, though."

The trainer grumbled a wet-sounding laugh within his chest. The corners of his mouth might have turned up into a smile. "At least you're honest."

He reached onto a cluttered crate and plucked up a pint bottle. Puckered around the rim, his mouth looked like the top of a drawstring coin purse. Vodka. Lucky Cossack brand. Look for the distinctive dancing Russian on the label. Rumored to strip varnish if spilled onto tabletops. He snugged the bottle into his lap and dropped his only hand down to Jocko's shoulder.

"Don't you be feeling too bad about Jocko here. That hardly ever happens to him."

"And it doesn't *bother* you?" Tim said. "You can't tell me it doesn't, not with the way you looked in that cage."

"Hell yes it bothers me!" It was the first sense of a fighting spirit he'd seen in the old man. "You think I *like* dragging him out on his back? You think I *like* cleaning the blood out of his nose? You think I *like* --" His voice broke off, quavering, then softened. ". . . think I like seeing him . . . hurt?" He shut his eyes. "Tears my heart out every time it happens."

"So why put him through it?"

"A lot you know," the old man grumbled. "I found him in one of those roadside zoos ten years ago. New Mexico. No, wait. Arizona. Ahh, one of 'em. In one of those wretched little holes where they charge you a buck to look at rattlesnakes while you wait to get your gas tank filled up. And there he was. They had him stuffed inside a cage, couldn't've been any bigger than three foot cubed. Fine-looking ape like him, in jail? So I bought him." He took an angry slug of vodka and let it burn all the way down. "Maybe this is no kind of life for him, but that was even worse. I did the best I could. What can you do, huh? Buy him a plane ticket back to the Congo? Put him in a *respectable* zoo? Put him to sleep? I did the *best I could*."

Tim wanted to cry. He would have bet this old man had never fathered a child. All those paternal instincts -- and something told him that in this man, who looked as stringy as beef jerky, they ran strong -- had been channeled into Jocko.

"If I'd known what he liked to eat, I would've brought him something."

The old man found this amusing. The wet laugh rumbled again. "Bribe him, eh? Try to get in good with Jocko?" He grinned. His eyes, sunk within oceans of wrinkles, were full of haggard wisdom. "That'd be about your only chance. He don't take too kindly to strangers. Even when they want to see him win."

Tim found himself nodding in perfect understanding. "I can see why."

"Yeah, you stick your hand too close and try to pet him, why, he just might give it back to you full of tooth holes."

"He can be that aggressive?"

"Oh, Judas priest, yes!" He ruffled the fur on Jocko's shoulder and looked down at him. "Show him your grin, Jocko."

As Tim watched, the placid chimp skinned his lips back, showing large teeth, tightly clenched. It was a lot like seeing Cheetah in a good mood in the Tarzan movies.

"Now show him your mad face."

Jocko stretched open his jaws, and Tim was mightily impressed. Top and bottom, Jocko sported sets of fangs that would have done any vampire proud. It was a display of many teeth and little mercy.

The old man gurgled a laugh into his vodka, which dribbled down his chin when he pulled the bottle away. "Those choppers just aren't for bananas, boy."

Tim was still contemplating this when the trainer's eyes narrowed, as if traveling far beyond these claustrophobic walls. At last he brought his gaze back.

"Are you wondering how I lost my arm?" he asked, deadly serious.

Tim felt his jaw going slack. "Not . . . not Jocko . . . ?"

The old man coughed up his loudest laugh yet. "No, not him!"

Tim relaxed, bouyantly relieved. "Then sure, I've been wondering ever since the tent show."

"You *are* honest, aren't you? Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, people tell me it hasn't even crossed their minds. Liars. But truth . . . I like that."

Whether valid or not, Tim felt he'd made a breakthrough. And as the trainer fortified himself with vodka, his eyes filmed with a new sort of haze. Of pain, of sacrifice. Of nobler times, forever lost.

"August seventh, 1942," he said, somber of voice. "I was with the First Marine Division when we hit Guadalcanal Island. Us and the Japs, fighting over this godforsaken pesthole."

"Second week we were there, I was with a squad that got cut off. Most of us got chopped to pieces by a Jap machine gun in a pillbox. You ever see a Jap Model Eleven machine gun?"

Tim shook his head. "Not that I know of."

"Ugly things, *ugly* things. Ours were practical looking. The Germans? Theirs were things of beauty. But the Jap guns? Looked like old antiques. Until they cut you in half."

"I was the last man left, and took two in the leg before I knocked 'em out with a grenade. I went limping away, and I was so damn cocky I forgot to be careful. Hit a trip-wire. You know what a punji ball is?"

Tim had to shake his head again.

The old man shut his eyes against the memory. "They pack a mud ball, big and heavy. While it's drying out they sink punji spikes allll over it. Hang it in a tree by a vine. You stumble into the booby trap and it swings down. I tried to dodge it, wasn't fast enough. Bastard ripped my arm half out of the socket."

Tim's own shoulder ached in sympathy. To the bone.

"I laid there for three days before some other leathernecks found me. Bled half to death. Got gangrene. Got malaria. Centipodes and spiders and things tried to eat at me. And I have no earthly idea why, but some blessed monkey -- a langur -- brought me food. Island fruit. I know I'd've died without it. After my canteen ran dry, I wasn't about to drink that filthy swampwater. I'd've died of disease for sure. I don't know why that monkey took pity on me. Or if you could even call it pity. But it saved my life."

He looked down at Jocko, his mouth a grim line. "And I guess I'm just paying it back the only way I ever found."

Tim didn't know what to say. Words wouldn't fit. Even silence didn't feel right, but sometimes silence is the least disagreeable way of looking like an idiot.

The old man sighed and swigged again. Sweat dribbled from the gray mat of his hair. "You always hear these bleeding hearts trying to prove some point, saying how man's the only mammal on the planet that wages war on his own kind. But don't you believe it." He smiled

grimly. "Old Jocko here, his kind . . . Chimpanzees'll go to war to the death over their territory, and to get more. Maybe that's why I took him in. We're both just a couple of sad old broken down warriors."

Tim wondered how to gracefully bow out and just slink home, and felt horribly at a loss. He watched as the old man drained his bottle and pitched it into a stained cardboard box. His waste can. And when he looked up, his eyes leveled on Tim like twin gunsights.

"Yeah, I saw you tonight, there in the audience. I saw you, alright. In a crowd like that, boy, you stick out like . . . like a one-armed man." The wrinkled leather of his face drew tight. Unreadable. "I want you to go now. You know what I see when I look at you?"

"Just another townie, I guess." Tim could barely speak.

"Just another townie who doesn't deserve the fate. I look at you and see all the chances I pissed away a long time ago." He scratched Jocko behind the ears, and the chimp responded much as a sleepy child. "Just get going. We need our rest."

Silently, Tim nodded and rose on cramping legs. His knees popped, and the first step put him in the doorway.

"Strawberry ice cream," came the old man's voice, behind him.

Tim stopped, turning back. "What?"

"Jocko loves strawberry ice cream." A sly grin. "Haagen Dazs."

••

The dead of night, when time no longer matters.

He drove, a bottle by his side. The seal was unbroken, and it would stay that way. The bottle was destined for his freezer, whenever he made it home. By dawn, perhaps. There was much to wonder about, and lately, thinking went best behind the wheel of a moving car. Especially when it traveled west.

He pondered all those 350-plus covers of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The small-town America of Norman Rockwell. Had it ever existed? Had there truly been a time when boys really carried frogs in their pockets and yanked girls' pigtails, when goofybig-eared fellows worked at soda fountains, when the druggist always slipped you an extra treat?

Yes. Yes, there had. Once upon a time. But no more.

Somehow the innocence had been sullied. And all the rigidity and tradition and veiled hatreds and retrograde thinking didn't seem so quaint anymore. How horribly apparent that must be when travelling from nameless town to nameless town, gazing at them all from within the bars of a thirty-foot cage.

But one thing would not have changed. *One thing*. They have their own peculiar kind of gravity, small towns

do. So hard to break free of. They cling with the weight of familiarity and security, with mothers who cannibalize their children rather than willingly turn them loose into the larger world to seek greater fortunes.

And in the end, didn't gravity always win?

One way or another.

**

Tim knew the old man would be waiting the next afternoon, in the pre-show hours. The invitation, however arcane, had been unmistakable. Tim did not disappoint. To the contrary, he delighted them with the gifts he came bearing.

"Findlandia Vodka," Tim said, passing across the bottle. It was still chilled from the hours spent in his freezer, the way it was meant to be drunk. "Kicks the titties off *your* rotgut."

The trainer recapped his latest pint of Lucky Cosack and took his first hit from the sculpted bottle. His eyes slid shut in bliss as the silken vodka charmed its way down his throat.

Jocko, apparently, knew a Haagen Dazs container by sight, and was on his legs and reaching as soon as Tim pulled it from the sack. Jocko uncapped it like an old pro, digging in with his fingers. And the both of them, Jocko and his withered trainer, the unlikeliest of old broken down warriors, were content to do little more than indulge themselves for quite some time.

By showtime, only one of them was conscious.

On this sultry evening, with the shadows looming long and straining for distance from their sources, Tim could hear the amplified spiel of the tent show barker. No doubt Jocko heard, and understood, for he pushed aside the empty ice cream container, a few pink dribbles added to an already stained floor.

Tim debated the next few moments for an eternity.

"So what'll it be?" Tim asked the chimp, who for all the world resembled an ancient child. "You gonna tear my hand off if I try to hook you up?"

Jocko blinked at him and squeaked. He tugged at the arm of the snoring old man, then looked back to Tim when his trainer did not respond.

I'll never know until I try.

The muzzle, the leash, the partial gauntlets . . . all hung from a clothes hook screwed into the wall. Tim took them down and, holding his breath, moved for Jocko. Could chimpanzees smell fear? If Jocko did, he gave no indication. He was as docile as a sheep.

As they left the camper shell, Tim grabbed his own special treat, which he had left in a sack on the truck's rear bumper. It was hardly anything edible, but he wasn't hungry anyway.

Tim found the hidden flap in the tent and led them both through, Jocko knuckling the ground beside him the entire way, as if they had been destined for one another.



Once inside, Tim saw the crowd, even larger than last night's audience. Good news about entertainment travels quickly.

When the barker came in, the ridiculous top hat perched atop his head like a home for wayward birds, he took one look at the far corner of the tent and waddled his way back.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked. Tim noticed he kept good and distant from Jocko.

"I joined on last town. We met once. Don't you remember?"

Sluggish memories crowded the barker's face. Thinking seemed far too strenuous an exercise. "Ahhh . . . yeah, yeah . . . I thought you looked familiar."

With a single cardiac lurch, Tim realized he didn't know the trainer's name. But no matter. "The old man's passed out again in his trailer. You know him and his vodka."

The barker knowingly rolled his eyes; no more needed to be said. He strolled away. Took his place.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Tonight you have come to see Jocko the Fighting Chimp!" The litany went on, the same as last night. The plea was the same, the entreaty for brave souls to face Jocko in the heat of combat. There was no hesitation, as the beery-faced guy Tim remembered was named Jess came swaggering forth to accept the challenge. High school machismo clawing for one last desperate bid at glory, laud, and honor.

He embodied everything about Rawlins which Tim despised.

And in those final moments when all eyes were on the barker and the contenders *du jour*, in that moment when Tim lingered with Jocko inside the cage door, he stooped to the chimp's level. Looked deeply into the brown eyes, at once trusting and cynically suspicious.

As quickly as he could, Tim loosened every strap that bound the muzzles and gauntlets. They would stay put for a few moments, no longer. For a fleeting instant, he felt sure that Jocko understood.

After all, even chimpanzees are capable of a kind of smile.

Tim vacated the cage as soon as Jess entered from the other end, and it was finally time to dip into the sack

he had brought along. His own little indulgence. Straight from the local True Value Hardware Store: A simple bicycle chain and lock.

As discreetly as he could manage, Tim sealed the door. He crossed at the rear of the cage, quite unobtrusive, as all eyes were glued on the two opponents squaring off inside, and he repeated the procedure at the other end with a second chain. Only then did the barker seem to fathom what was going on under his nose.

But by then, it was too late.

As Tim was making for the exit, his stride as cool and calm as he had ever known, he heard the wet smack of Jess' fist connecting with primate face. The sound couldn't help but bring a sympathetic wince straight from the core of Tim's soul. But vindication was at hand. He peripherally saw something hurtle into the side of the cage, heard the delicate clitter of the muzzle's tiny buckles. The gauntlets must have followed next. Then the entire cage trembled as something far heavier was slammed into its bars.

Those choppers just aren't for bananas, boy.

Tim paused in the flap, lingering as the audience's singular mind voiced alarm, then terror at the spectacle enacted before their eyes. But they had paid their money, and so they were obligated their show. He heard Jess scream, a high sound, anything but macho. Above it all rose the full-throated fury of a chimpanzee who had been denied his nature for far too long. *It's not all Bonzo Goes to College, now, is it, folks?*

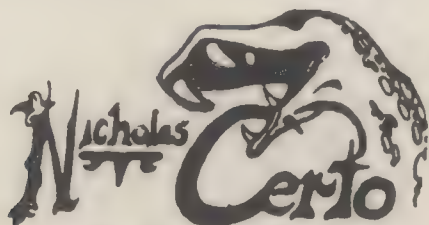
Mia's voice, from the distant past: *We're talking about a dumb animal here.*

The old man had been right. It was no life for a noble beast to lead. At the very least, he deserved to go out in a blaze of glory and retribution. After all, even sad broken down old warriors deserve the valor of one last battle.

As Tim closed the flap behind him, he smiled and knew that the mishmash of sounds from the cage was music to his ears. Savage, primal . . . and wonderfully liberating.

For, best of all . . . the *true* dumb animal was losing.

-- CD



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THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

THE MOTHERS AND FATHERS ITALIAN ASSOCIATION

A MODEST PROPOSAL IN WHICH WE WHUP-ASS ON THE SUITS

If I wanted to impress you I would tell you I'm writing these words as I ride the ANTHRAX train from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara. To my left is the Pacific Ocean; to my right, the cliffs and foothills of some mountains which border the Mojave Desert. I would tell you these things to show you that I'm a sophisticated traveller and I can afford a laptop computer, but since I don't really care what you think of me, I'm not gonna bother.

It's sufficient to know that I've been out here in L.A. to attend HWA, Inc.'s annual awards banquet, and to spend a week or two free-loading off friends I can't get to see much during the year. A few days with Ellison, a few with Bischoff and Mike Cassutt, maybe a Dodger game with Bill Relling, a sleaze-bar (*Bare Elegance* . . . down by LAX airport) with Tom Elliott, you know, the usual routine. I like L.A., despite it being pretty much just an endless stretch of suburban clichés -- malls, car dealerships, tract housing, fast food eateries, and other franchised restaurants. Regardless of all that shit, Los Angeles remains a city unlike any other because of the TV and movie industries, and also because there's a *lot* of money out there. If you're talented at convincing people to give you some

of their L.A. Money, you can live very well indeed.

I have this determination that I will someday get some of their money. I may spend it out here, or maybe I'll take it somewhere else and spend it. But I'll get it, and I'll spend it. You can go to sleep on that one.

But I digress. I wanted to tell you about the HWA banquet and then share a few thoughts and observations it sparked off in me. The HWA weekend was held in a Big Chain hotel in Redondo Beach -- a clean, bright community south of L.A. defined by marinas, gentrified restaurants, and lots of young women on roller-blades. The actual awards banquet was preceded by the expected mix of parties and panels and a business meeting in which we all argued and bitched and agreed on various topics.

In all three activities, I accounted for myself with my usual charm and wit and style. But I was also in an observant mode, and I noticed several things about us "horror writers" as the weekend progressed. (1) We're a far less homely and overweight bunch than most other writer's organizations. (2) We have a lot of female members. (3) We have a lot more power than we realize.

Time Out.

I began writing that article, as stated, back in June 1991, and it was to be the MAFIA column scheduled to appear in the previous issue of *CD*. But several things intervened (one being Editor Rich's *insistence* that I use the "Terror Out of Tujunga" column as my inaugural appearance in these pages) and so *that* older column became *this* issue's column instead.

Okay, now that we got that straight, let me continue. The only other thing I'll say is that if this column gets too long, it will become a two-part essay. And if some of you start whining about having to wait till *next* issue to get the complete scoop, well, you know how I feel about whiners . . .

Anyway, I was saying that we members of the HWA, Inc. have a lot more power than we realize . . . But actually I should amend that to read: *all* writers have a lot more power than they think they do. And I'm not talking the usual Union-talk and the tired rhetoric of that politically correct-leftist/marxist-bullshit National Writers Union either.

I'm talking about the power of the Personal Computer.

Hey, *Goombah*, you're proba-

bly thinking, wake up! Writers (at least some of the non-Luddites among us) have been using computers for ten years or more!

Yeah, yeah, I know. I'm talking about something else. Pay attention. In New York, in the skyscrapers where the Corporate Suits live and work, things are not so hip. Believe it or not, I have no knowledge of *any* publishers who will allow their writers to turn in their finished manuscripts on a computer disk(!). [And if there *are* any such enlightened houses in the Apple, I invite them to fax me (now there's a neat idea) at (410)484-8843 to set the record straight.] They would rather us do things the old-fashioned way with the ten-pound manuscripts and the multiple Xerox copies and all the ridiculous mailing/shipping costs. I'm surprised they don't require tall stools and quill pens (maybe I should shut up before I give some numhead editor a new idea . . .).

But that's just a symptom, friends, not the disease.

The real malaise in modern publishing is WASTE and EXCESS EXPENSE, which translates into the Suits paying you LESS for your work and paying MORE for all the other industry dross like rent on those skyscraper-hives, the power to heat and electrify them, the salaries of all the drones, etc. The real disease is writers getting paid essentially the same money they were getting paid SIXTY and SEVENTY years ago.

Now I know none of this should be News to any but the true feebs among you. But what *is* News is that we can change this sorry, mendacious, venal "tradition" in publishing of paying all but the most outrageous bestselling authors the most insulting of coolie wages.

The Great God Technos has decided to be kind to us poor humans. Computer technology is now so good that any writer can place on his desktop everything he needs to supply any printer/bindery with camera-ready, designed & typeset copy. In other words, you or I can go

from idea to word-on-the-page to plates-ready-to-print without submitting ourselves to the indignities and imprecations of the whole New York Publishing Syndrome. What I'm saying is this: we need the Suits and the Conglomerate-held publishing companies about as much as we need a second asshole.

Some of you must be thinking about now that I'm sitting here raving about self-publishing -- not exactly a new concept . . . And others must be screaming about distributors and how it's impossible to get them . . .

Hey, I'm hip. I'll get to that stuff. Read on.

So, yeah, it *is* self-publishing, but with a difference, and here it is. If there is a market, a ready'n'waiting audience for a particular book, or more importantly, a particular *author*, you gotta realize Booksellers are not much interested who the publisher of that book or author might be. It could be G.P. Putnam and Sons or it could be some schlepp in his basement (like me), and the booksellers couldn't give a shit if they think they can sell lots of copies. Carrying this a little farther, let's say you are a very good-selling author -- maybe not the Colossi of New York like Steve King or Sydney Sheldon or Danielle "Steal," but some very strong names in the marketplace like say Ken Follet or David Morrell or Peter Straub.

Okay, let's say you (1) take your next book and *instead* of packing the big clunky manuscript in that box you always have a hard time scrounging up and mailing it to New York . . . instead, you walk into your office, and print out camera-ready, crop-marked pages and you send them to your bindery.

Then you (2) pay the bindery around \$1.00 per book to print 20,000 copies and you put a price tag of \$20.00 on it.

Then you (3) call the Walden-Dalton buyers, the monolithic book distributors like Ingram and Baker & Taylor, and some of the smaller op-

erations, and you tell them you can offer your next book (with a built-in, guaranteed audience, mind you . . .) at the amazing discount of 65%(!) off the cover price -- which is about 15% *more* than they're normally getting from the Suits in their 80-story hives. You offer them the books so cheaply for two reasons: (a) because you can afford to do it, and (b) because you don't want any returns. The distributors and booksellers are going to like this idea because you have just levered up their profit-margins tremendously.

They will buy your book, and now I want you to guess where the bookstores are going to put your product? In the back of the store? Camouflaged among the racks on the side walls? Or right up front by the registers and in the display windows? Well, think about it -- if you're a bookstore selling two items, one of which is going to get you maybe a 40% profit and the other is going to make you a 60% profit, which one is going to get the prominent positioning in the store?

Yeah. No shit.

Now what does this mean for you, the well-known author with an audience who is *waiting* for your next book? It means that if you were getting from The Suits a 15% royalty on cover price (which we all know is the BEST of all royalties most of us could ever hope for . . .) they would pay you a \$3.00 royalty on each \$20.00 book sold. (It should be pointed out that The Suits would pay you this royalty on the average of about EIGHTEEN months *after* the book was published and they've collected *their* money, AND let's not forget their standard practice of withholding HALF of the money due you "against returns" from the booksellers that may or may not ever take place -- which means they will pay you, if you're lucky, around \$1.50 per book).

It also means that if you published the book yourself, you will get, *when you make the sale and not eighteen months later*, \$7.00 on each book sold. You will get the money without

any being held against returns. You will get it to spend or to earn interest for *you* instead of *The Suits*. If you subtract the \$1.00 per book you spent to produce the book, you have still picked up \$6.00 per book which figures out to be a 30% royalty, which is at least twice, and most likely *three* times, what you could ever hope to get from *The Suits*.

Sounds good, doesn't it?

Yeah, I think so too. I say this even though most writers would tell you that getting the distribution would be tough or maybe even impossible to nail down. But that's just a bullshit cop-out mouthed by people who are too lazy to find a better way to do business. If I've learned anything during my time on this planet, it's that you *can* make things happen if you truly *want* them to. If you want distribution badly enough, you can get it. Believe it, friends.

Now, you ask, all this sounds just great if you have a Big Enough Name to command the attention of book distributors and booksellers. But what about the rest of us? -- that vast swarm of writers who used to be called "mid-list" writers back when there *was* a mid-list... The majority of writers do not bring a built-in audience into the bookstores, so what do we do?

And another thing -- if this whole self-publishing thing is so great, then *why haven't* writers like Morrell or Straub or even the Kings and Sheldons and Steeles just told *The Suits* to take a hike and set up their own publishing industries?

Good questions, these.

Okay, I've thought about this a lot and being the creative, intelligent, perceptive guy that I am, I naturally have some observations and some answers that might be meaningful, and -- dare I say it? -- inspiring.

First question: *How come the Heavyweights haven't given The Suits the kiss-off already?* I'm not sure why any of them individually have not gone to self-publishing, but I think I have some general reasons that may

serve. Initially I think it's fair to say that most of us have no fucking *clue* as to just how incredibly accommodating *The Suits* can be to their best-selling authors. I mean, the phrase "ass-kissing" takes on new levels of import, fraught with meaning and heavy with metaphor. One friend of mine, a very well-known, very well-respected member of the Bestseller Club, actually had the deed to a Manhattan upper West Side townhouse written into his book contract as partial payment for his novel, *and his publisher went along with the deal!*

Yeah, I'm stunned too. But it is merely a very real example of how the Guys and Dolls on *The List* are treated differently than the Rest Of Us. And it may be an indicator as to why there ain't no such thing as the "Koontz Press" or "Sheldon Associates" -- the members of *The List* are making *so much* jing they don't feel like screwing around with running their own publishing companies. That's gotta be the *only* reason that makes sense. Why else would they allow *The Suits* to remain in the food chain? Must be nice...

As for the second question: *What do the Rest Of Us do about this new power that's been handed to us?*

The answer to that question, friends, is more lengthy than space in this month's column allows. It is, in fact, the "Modest Proposal" of the subtitle, and will be addressed in great detail next ish. Believe me, it's gonna be a killer column, so don't miss it. Till next time, keep-a you noses a-clean.

Ciao, people.

SHAMELESS PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION DEPT.

My monster novel, *The Blood of the Lamb*, is scheduled to appear from TOR as a \$22.95 hardcover around Easter. It's a thriller and it is easily the best thing I've ever written (other than these excellent columns,

he said, with a sly, stylin' grin), and you should all go out and buy it and put *me* on the bestseller list so I won't have to write the second half of this column.

Interested readers can write Tom Monteleone at P.O. Box 5788, Baltimore, MD 21208

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MATTHEW J.
COSTELLO

NIGHTMARE ALLEY

A few issues back, I shared with you a wonderful experience that I had with ants. Without repeating the icky details, let it suffice that it was a bad day at black rock for me when I decided to eliminate the animals from our household community.

And the point that I was making ("See, Martha--the man *does* try to make points!") was that everyday ordinary experiences can be transmogrified into horrible episodes for your book.

No, scratch that--I'm afraid that it didn't come out quite right. Nobody wants horrible episodes . . . But scenes of true *horror* can be created out of the humdrum of everyday life. Why, just go to the local supermarket, preferably to a really *big* one with its own bakery, meat market, video rental kiosk, and sex toys department. The air of unreality is overwhelming, with a parade of people who -- it must be admitted -- look as though they had just come from an updated set of Fellini Satyricon.

Then there are the real tragedies life deals out. And those must be used judiciously. Call me superstitious, but real pain lacks artistic power. Real tragedy is about real hurt. And -- for me -- that's not what writing is about.

So, kiddies, back to the ants. This month my new novel *Darkborn* appears. It will most likely appear briefly, and in the most unlikely places. (My last book, *Wurm*, never reared its head at Waldens, but -- boy -- did I ever see it in the hospital gift shops. Some buyer there must have a grisly sense of humor . . .)

And *Darkborn* features an ant scene of true scope. Trust me . . . the book's copy-editor, with whom I had a relationship consisting mostly of annoyed queries on yellow post-its, left a *fan* post-it. "The ant scene is great!" the mini-note said.

It had better be. The real-life experience was way over-the-top.

So here -- for educational purposes, and in slightly different form -- is the beginning of said scene . . .

Whelan stood up.

His beige pants were stained from the poached eggs he ate this morning. That, and the drops of scotch that dribbled onto his pants.

Whelan walked over to the vertical blinds, and pulled one strip aside to look out.

It was a brilliant, sunny morning. Another perfect fucking day, with the sun, obnoxious and oppressive, insisting on working its way into the house, through sliver-thin cracks in the folds of the blinds, under the

door jamb, tiptoeing in from other rooms not quite so perfectly sealed

Why the *hell* am I so rattled? he thought.

What is wrong with me?

He saw an ant.

It was on his glossy black coffee table, almost camouflaged by the black wood. The ant, a big fat carpenter ant, hesitated. Whelan watched the ant do something to its antennae. Cleaning them. Or something. Then it continued moving across the table, up the side of a bowl, leading to the crumbs of some hard-as-wood Pennsylvania Dutch pretzels.

It kept going.

"Bastard," Whelan said. He slammed at the bowl with his hand, not caring that he was using his fingers to smash the insect.

He smacked at it.

He pulled back.

The ant was stuck to his fingers. Half of its body was crushed, but the other half -- including the head -- was still alive, still writhing.

"Goddam--" he said, and he brought his hand *thwap!* flat against the table, definitely flattening the ant this time.

He tried to return to his thoughts.

What am I worried about, he asked himself?

What?

But a tiny, nagging voice at the back of his head suggested that he knew what he was worried about.

Oh, yeah.

He knew that Kiff wanted to tell the truth about that night. The fucking truth.

The truth that even Will didn't know.

But I do.

And I didn't say anything.

And now what was going to happen? Kiff was going to tell the world. There might have been new hearings.

Maybe it was no big deal, Whelan thought.

But it doesn't matter now anyway. Because Kiff is dead.

Chewed by rats.

What a way to go. Poor bastard. Poor haunted--

Another ant. And another! Christ, they were like two crooks breaking and entering, darting across the tabletop, looking left, right, preening their antennae, probably dropping a chemical trail for the others to follow.

This way to the cats, gang. This way.

Whelan walked into his kitchen, sliced by sunlight spilling onto the windows. The brilliant light hurt his eyes.

He reached above the refrigerator and opened a cabinet. He moved some cans aside, until he found a big yellow and purple can of Raid Ant and Spider spray. Industrial

strength.

I don't have spiders, Whelan thought. But I sure as hell have ants. He grabbed the can, gave it a test spritz to make sure that it was full and ready for action. He pressed the nozzle down and the perfumey toxin filled the kitchen.

Now, we're ready for business.

Whelan walked back out to the living room.

Only now the pretzel bowl was filled with ants. They scurried around inside, some holding giant flakes of pretzel crust over their ant heads like trophies. Still more were climbing up the coffee table leg, hurrying across the shiny table surface, ready to party.

"Oh, shit," Whelan said, and he pointed the canister right at the bowl and blasted away. The jet-like vapor blew some of the smaller, less facile ants right out of the bowl. Whelan muttered to himself, cursing, as he adopted a side-to-side motion with his hand, spraying the whole table now, in a great arc, back and forth.

He watched the ants stop dead in their tracks. If he saw any twitching, hanging onto their happily communal existence, he gave them a direct blast that left their black exoskeletons sopping with Johnson and Johnson's best bug-killing petrochemicals. "Take that, fuckers," he said. In a few seconds, the battlefield was empty. The ants were dead.

But he looked at the floor.

God, there were some! Damn! There were ants making their way to the table leg and stopping.

Maybe I need an exterminator, Whelan thought. Maybe this is a serious ant problem. But he remembered dealing with ants other years. They come in when it's too hot, or too cold, or too wet, or--

Too something.

If I can get the message out that they aren't going to fucking prosper here, why then I'll have the problem licked.

Sure.

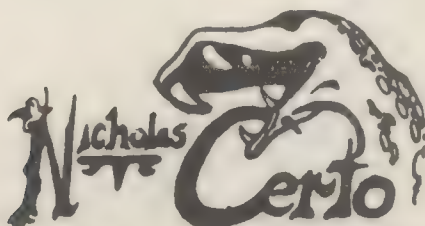
I just have to find out where they're coming from.

He licked his lips, thinking that he'd like another sip of scotch. But -- he saw -- unfortunately his glass had been in the bomb zone. However, toxic it was before, it was far worse now.

So, Whelan thought, screw it. And he got down on his knees, on the plush blue rug, ready to follow the trail of ants back to their point of entry...

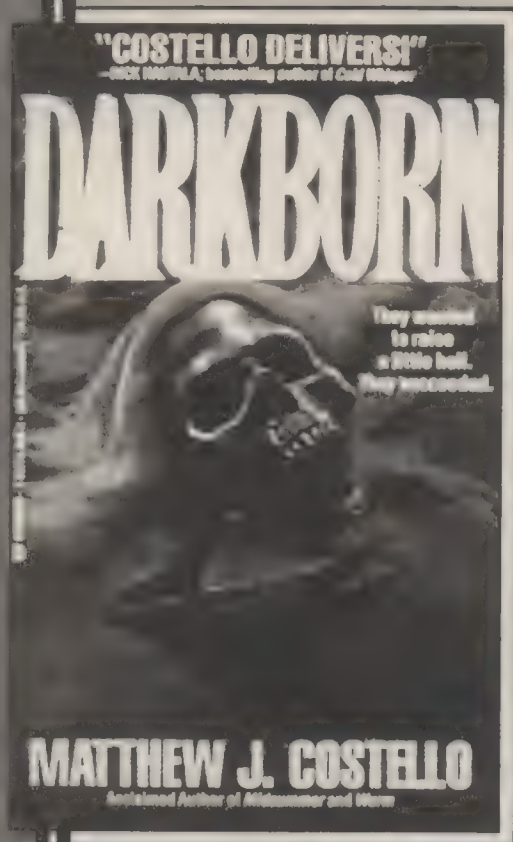
For the rest, you will have to pick up *Darkborn*. It just may be my last horror novel for a while. (And boy, wasn't Charlie Grant on the money last CD with his view that "Horror" isn't a genre?)

The reason for my temporary absence from the horror racks can be found in my current column in *Mystery Scene*. I also explain where *Darkborn* came from. Fans of Bill Blatty, spinning heads, and the outer fringes of Catholic mysticism are invited to check it out...



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COSTELLO, ACCLAIMED
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AND *WORM* ...

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AUTHOR: Matthew J. Costello
PRICE: \$4.99/\$5.99 Can. ISBN: 1-55773-660-X
PAGES: 336 SPINE: 27/32"
CARTON: 50 CATEGORY: Horror, 04
RIGHTS: US, CAN, OM ex BC
AUTHOR HOME: New York state
LOCALE: New York City
BACKGROUND: original

DIAMOND FEBRUARY
1992

A CHRISTMAS STORY

JAMES S. DORR

JAMES S. DORR's short fiction is popping up in many fine publications, including several prestigious anthologies. His story in Thomas F. Monteleone's *Borderlands II* was a knock-out! The following bite of seasonal terror is Dorr's first fiction appearance in *Cemetery Dance*.

He wasn't dreaming of reindeer and sugarplums. At least not yet. But as Timmy Hunter lay in his bed, still half awake, he did think about the new fallen snow, ideal for the runners of Santa's sled when it came down to land. He thought about the crisp night air, and about how Santa would be bundled up against the cold. About how, with so many homes to visit, so many more presents to be delivered before Christmas morning, Santa would be tired when he got there.

Tired and hungry.

**

Downstairs, Timmy's mother, Annet, was finishing decorating the tree. She turned to her friend, Charles.

"Darling," she said. "How's the eggnog coming? Did you leave some unspiked like I asked you?"

"Just about finished," Charles replied. He straightened the red, fur-trimmed cap on his head, then looked at her sternly. "The unspiked for you?"

Annet giggled. "Only if I've been a good little girl, Santa. What do you think?"

Charles laughed as well as he poured out two cups with rich, sweet rum in them. He handed one to the slim, dark-haired woman who reached out to take it, then put it down on the table behind her. "First things first, Santa," Annet said, smiling.

He set down his own drink and pulled her to him, his lips meeting hers, as she, in turn, steered him toward the soft fleece rug in front of the fireplace. "Not too loud, darling," she said between kisses. She guided his hand to the back of her skirt. "One time, before . . . before Robert died, Timmy actually came downstairs thinking he'd heard the real Santa Claus and . . ."

Charles held her to him. "You're sure you're okay, Annet? I mean, I know it's been more than a year since the accident, but some memories stay on. They *should* stay on. They . . ."

Annet touched her finger to Charles' lips. "Shhh, darling," she said. "Of course I loved Robert, but I love you too, now. And Timmy likes you. The really sad memory -- you'll think this is silly -- but Timmy's so young. The really sad thing was, what with the funeral expenses and all, I couldn't afford to get Timmy the presents he'd wanted that Christmas. And you know what?" She giggled the way she had before. "I tried to explain to Timmy, about the money, but he was too young to understand. Instead, he blamed Santa."

Charles reached to straighten his cap again, then glanced to his right, to the jumble of brightly wrapped packages heaped underneath the tree. "Well," he whispered, "I hope *this* Santa will have helped make it up to him this year."

"Yes, I think so, darling," Annet said. She pressed against him and nuzzled his neck, then pulled him down with her onto the rug. "But what about *me*?"

**

"It was a lousy Christmas for Timmy," Annet said, after they'd readjusted their clothes and were sipping eggnog on the couch. "All I could wrap for him was a scarf and some shirts and things -- the kind of things kids know they'll get anyway -- and one or two cheap toys. I was really afraid he'd lost his belief in Santa that year. Still, kids bounce back. This year he wrote his letter to Santa Claus as usual. You know, you've seen it. And then, tonight, just before bedtime, he shooed me out of the kitchen the same way he's always done to make Santa's sandwich."

"Santa's sandwich?" Charles asked.

"Yeah," she said. She started to snuggle closer to Charles, then glanced at her watch and stood up instead.

"Oh, my gosh," she said. "It's almost time for you to leave, and I'll need you to help me. Anyway, you know how, when you were a kid, you maybe left out milk and cookies for Santa? So he could have a snack on his rounds? And then, Christmas morning, you'd always check to make sure some of the milk had been drunk and the cookies eaten?"

"Yeah," Charles said. He put his red Santa Claus cap back on. "Of course, later on, we realized it was always Dad who . . ."

"Shhh," Annet said. "Timmy doesn't know yet that you're going to be his new daddy. I thought tomorrow night, when you come over to have dinner with us, we'd make the announcement . . ."

"I love you, Annet," he said in her ear, then held her and kissed her. "But you're right. It is late. What are you going to want me to do?"

"Well, we do a sort of variant here. It started because neither Robert or I cared for milk -- you know how it is when you get older. So I'll get you a glass from the kitchen and I'll want you to pour the unspiked eggnog into it, then take a big drink, so it makes a stain on the glass like milk does, then put it on the mantelpiece."

"Okay," Charles said. He waited until she came back from the kitchen, a milk glass in one hand and a sloppily put together sandwich on a paper plate in the other. He took the glass and filled it with eggnog straight from the carton, then went to the fireplace and took a big drink.

"How am I doing?" he asked with a wink, as he set the half empty glass down on the mantel.

"Wonderful, darling," Annet said. "But now comes the tough part." She handed him the plate with the sandwich. "You see, after we'd convinced Timmy that Santa would probably prefer to have eggnog instead of just milk, he got his own idea. He figured, instead of store bought cookies, Santa would rather have something he'd made for him all by himself. So" -- Annet giggled -- "that's why I'll need you to take a big bite of this perfectly *awful* peanut butter and jelly sandwich."

Charles gave the sandwich a dubious look. "You know something, Annet. Maybe I could just tear off a corner . . ."

Annet laughed. "It has to be a *real* bite. He'll check it. That's why the eggnog had to be unspiked -- he'll put his nose in the glass to check it too in the morning."

Charles looked down at the plate again, at the lumpy bread-covered form in its center. "Peanut butter and jelly, eh?"

"It's his favorite sandwich. The way he sees it, it's nothing but the best for Santa." She kissed him quickly. "Do it for me?"

"Well," he said. "If you put it that way." He set the plate down on the mantel, next to the glass, and picked up the sandwich. He took a big bite and chewed it and swallowed.

"My God. It's gritty!"

"He must have used crunch style peanut butter," Annet said. "And lord knows what else he had on his hands -- he's only a kid." She took the rest of the sandwich from Charles and put it on the plate on the mantel, then kissed him hard. "But it means so much to him . . ."

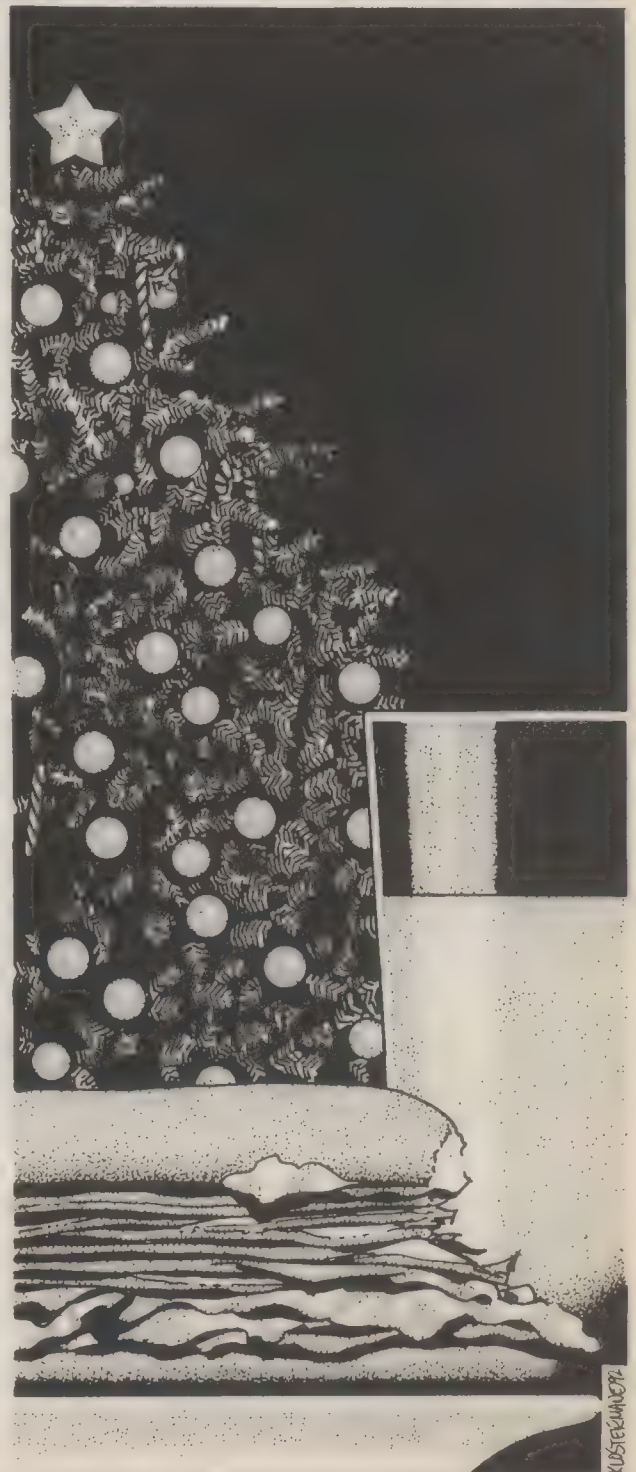
**

. . . and Timmy's eyes finally closed of their own accord as he drifted off to sleep, his hand still clutching

the box of rat poison from the kitchen that he'd used to make Santa's snack extra special. He dreamed, not of sugarplums and reindeer, but of the crummy trick Santa had played the last Christmas. The clothes and the cheap toys. How, for a whole year, he'd planned to get even.

He slept very soundly, not even hearing the screams that began to echo downstairs, and he dreamed about Mommy's new boyfriend, Charles, and how much nicer *he* was than Santa.

-- CD



A CONVERSATION WITH CLIVE BARKER

TYSON BLUE

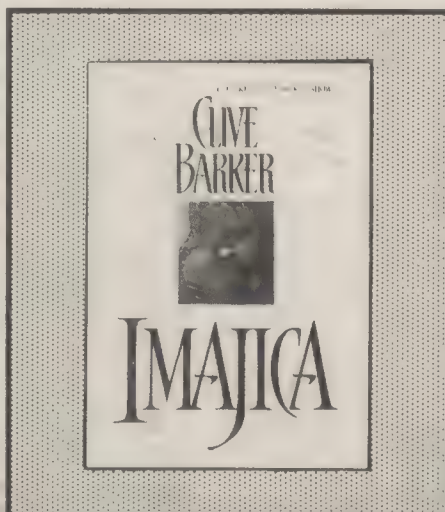
CEMETERY DANCE: The first thing we need to talk about, I guess, is your new book.

CLIVE BARKER: Well, it's 850 pages of, I suppose, what would loosely be characterized as a fantasy book. It marks the continuation of my departure from horror fiction, which began with *Weaveworld* and went on with *Great and Secret Show* and now *Imajica*. It's a religious book, I suppose -- I mean, the Christ figure appears in the book, the hero turns out to be the half-brother of Christ, in fact -- and it's a book which, in terms of its philosophical and geographical canvas, is unlike anything I've ever attempted before.

CEMETERY DANCE: It's got, what, five worlds hooked up together?

BARKER: That's right, and flora and fauna to go in each of them, and cultures and cults and philosophies and gods and goddesses. So it's a large-scale endeavor, and I suppose the invention or the construction of a cosmology is something which is always implicit in the kind of material I've done, with Cenobites and the sort of reconfiguring of hell which appeared in the "Hellraiser" material. The various tribes in *Weaveworld*, Quiddity and its various components, enemies and forces in *Great and Secret Show* are all fantasies and creations, mythologies that are not rooted so much in the sort of dead mythologies of Norse and Greek cultures, the way that Tolkien, for instance, does, but to

actually reconfigure and readdress the kind of mythologies which touch our own culture, primarily the Christian mythology. I don't think I'm going to get good reviews from the *Christian Monitor*, you understand...



BARKER: It seems to me that one should approach this material on the basis that -- and I would argue this passionately for *fantastique* work -- that it is material which connects and confronts the elements of our lives at its best; not something which flees from those elements.

And I don't like *fantastique* fiction which is simply escapism. I have no interest in the wizards, elves and the like. It seems to me that this type of work is at its best when it's being confrontational.

CEMETERY DANCE: Right. And that vein's been pretty much done to death anyway.

BARKER: Yeah, but then you've got people doing it over and over and over again, however, as any casual glance down the lines of fantasy books in your store will prove that they're full of the sort of books that you can tell from their covers, and probably from their titles, that they're trilogies about sacred swords and the like.

CEMETERY DANCE: What's the initial reaction been to *Imajica*?

BARKER: Very good, critically and in terms of sales. It's certainly my best-reviewed book so far. And we're in our fourth printing. So yeah, we're doing very well. I mean, I'm not going to outsell *Scarlett*, you understand, but it is a complex book, it's an ambitious book, it's a large book, and yet people continue wanting to step up to it to buy it and see what it's about.

CEMETERY DANCE: I like the cover design for it too.

BARKER: They did a great job. And one of the great things about Harper-Collins is that they have been packaging me in a way which is not genrecentric, if I may coin a word. I mean they're not terribly interested, and thank God for this, in sort of just saying, "Okay, this guy is working this particular genre, and this is the market we're selling to, so this is what we put on the cover."

With *Great and Secret Show*, with this, and actually with the reissue that they've done with *The Hellbound Heart*, they've really gone for classy,

interesting covers which are not maybe going to put off readers who aren't really sure about this kind of area. I mean, they're inviting covers, they're not covers which, you know, trap you in one genre.

CEMETERY DANCE: That does work out pretty well.

BARKER: I think it's very important, because I think there is a whole marketplace out there that says, "I don't read horror; I don't read fantasy; I don't read science fiction." There really is -- there are biases out there, and most of them are totally irrational, but nevertheless, they have to be got past. And judging by the sales, we're beginning to break outside of the market of the people who would conventionally buy a Clive Barker book into another market, and it's very pleasing when I go to the signings around the country and find

a lot of middle-aged, middle-brow people -- I don't mean that in a pejorative sense at all -- I mean people who just are not marginal in any sense, whose imaginations are still open, and whose sense of wonder is still alive, who say, "Yeah, give me a slice of this, I'll have a go at this." And maybe they wouldn't have been tempted to do that if they'd picked up *The Books of Blood* or *The Damnation Game*.

CEMETERY DANCE: Are you finding, or do you have any way of telling, from reader mail or whatever, whether a lot of longtime readers who've been with you since *The Books of Blood* or whatever are staying for the ride?

BARKER: Yes, they are, by and large they are. And the clearest way to tell is in the number of books sold, which has grown steadily. But I think

the other place to tell is, as you say, in the reader mail, where people write in and say, you know, "I liked *The Books of Blood*," but the place where, if I was to lose readers, I would've lost them, was with *Weaveworld*, when there was a 90-degree turn. You know, the last stuff that I'd done had been *The Books of Blood*. They'd been very graphic, very bloody, and then I was turning toward something else. And by and large, those readers stayed with me. And now, *Imajica's* outsold *Weaveworld* three to one, probably, so I think the readership that bought *The Books of Blood* and *The Damnation Game* weren't buying me for the chills and spills in the same way that they might buy one of Steve's books. At least in part they were buying me for the bizarritry of the imagination.

CEMETERY DANCE: That's always been your strong point, at least



Photo Credit: Beth Gwinn

from my viewpoint.

BARKER: Right. And that is there in spades in a book like *Imajica*. And so even though, you know, the gore scenes and the graphic dismemberings, all the Grand Guignol paraphernalia which I brought to *The Books of Blood* are not as emphasized in *Imajica*, although they're still there on occasion, the strangeness of the imagination is as obvious and clear as it ever was. And probably, in a book that's 850 pages long, you have more of a chance to develop some of those strangenesses than you do in a short book. I mean, you can whip up a much more bizarre confection over that period of pages than you can in the thirty pages of a short story.

CEMETERY DANCE: *Great and Secret Show* was the first Book of the Art, which is going on for two more books, at least. Is *Imajica* going to be continued, or is it self-contained?

BARKER: Both *Imajica* and *Weaveworld* have always been self-contained novels and I will never do sequels to them. Just because I feel some books -- you create some books knowing you want a sequel, and *Great and Secret Show* was one example. And *Cabal* was another book which I want to write sequels to. *Imajica* was constructed as a single narrative, the same as *Weaveworld*, which are, as far as I can see, sealed narratives. Which isn't to stop somebody doing to me, fifty years after my death, what they've just done to poor Margaret Mitchell!

(Laughter)

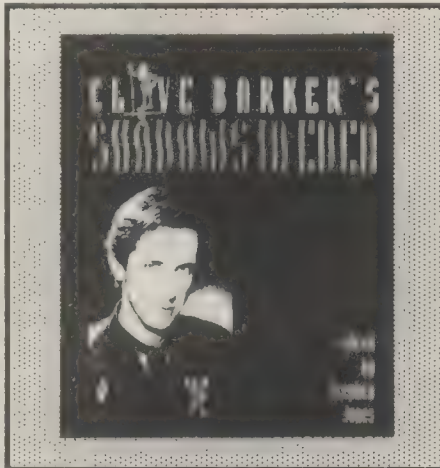
BARKER: But surely, within my lifetime, there will not be sequels.

CEMETERY DANCE: Another thing I've noticed in the publicity material for *Imajica* is that you've got a children's book coming out next year. Can you tell us something about that?

BARKER: A short fable for children, which is as yet untitled. But then, this isn't exactly a children's project, but it's a project which will have, I hope, crossover appeal; that is, a project which will appeal to adults as well as to young adults in the same sense as *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, the Ray Bradbury book.

CEMETERY DANCE: Or Dean Koontz' *Oddkins*?

BARKER: No, not really. Because Dean's book is very much a children's book, I mean in the nicest possible sense. I mean, the illustrations and so on, they announce themselves as being something like that. This is much more of a fantasy novel, it'll be 250 pages long, so you will immediately have lost the eight-or-nine year-olds, because it's simply too big a book. But the thing that'll mark it as a book in the other direc-



tion, as it were, from adult readers to the young adults, would be the fact that it has a young adult protagonist, which I've never really done before. And I'm looking forward to that whole process. You're obviously writing about your own past in part, looking back at your own adolescence.

CEMETERY DANCE: So it would be more correct to term it a young adult novel than a children's book?

BARKER: Yeah, I think it's an imaginative novel that will appeal widely.

And the fact is, and I get this from my reader mail, that a lot of twelve-, thirteen-, fourteen-year-olds are out there who've been reading *The Books of Blood* and *Weaveworld* and so on, so I mean it's not as though that audience is not there in part anyway. And they're there in larger numbers than before because of the comic books.

CEMETERY DANCE: I was going to come to them later, but since we've gotten there, Marvel has been doing some interesting things with your concepts for "Hellraiser" and "Cabal," including the thing that started up in October where they're crossing over.

BARKER: *Jihad*.

CEMETERY DANCE: How much of that were you involved in, if at all?

BARKER: It's my baby in the sense that I went to Dan Chichester and said, "Wouldn't it be neat to have Pinhead with Palequin, Nightbreed versus Hellraiser?" And he went for it, because he's got a great imagination and can step up to any challenge like that. And I think he's done a really good job. It's only two issues, of course. It's a complete story in two issues and they're not going to write it any longer than that. But we think we might do it again next year if it works out this year.

CEMETERY DANCE: I haven't seen it yet, so I don't know.

BARKER: You have a good store in your neighborhood, however?

CEMETERY DANCE: Yeah, and I get most of my stuff from Lee Tennant, a wholesaler in Illinois.

BARKER: It'll come your way, then.

CEMETERY DANCE: Yeah, I expect it to show up most any time.

BARKER: Well, Paul Johnson did

the artwork. He did really beautiful, detailed work, and Chichester scripted it and I think he did a great job there. I feel that what's happened with all of this material is that the mythologies are being expanded every which way by all kinds of imaginations. Some of them I like, and some of them I don't like. But then, that's sort of an inevitable process, really.

CEMETERY DANCE: And it does seem to be expanding a little bit too, as the Eclipse books seem to be winding down -- at least I haven't seen a new one in about a year or so --

BARKER: Yes, well, *The Yattering and Jack* comes from John Bolton and Eclipse, but we've certainly seen people's commitments to the world of Clive Barker expand, and I've just sold them on a couple of completely new ideas which will not be based upon any previous incarnations.

I think I would enjoy comic books, I'm a fan of comic books, I'm a collector of comic books, so it's a natural for me to have spent time working on these ideas with people who have such a profound commitment to comic books as an art form. And many of the people at Marvel do. And I know, Marvel comes in for a lot of flack from people, but there are some prime players there who do a lot of really wonderful work.

CEMETERY DANCE: I think so, too.

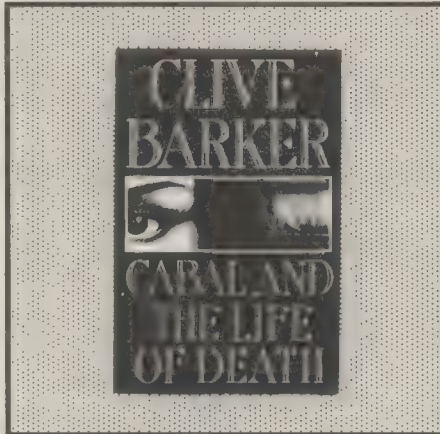
BARKER: I think, you know, though I don't read every Marvel comic that comes out, I nevertheless find a high level of expertise there and enjoy them.

CEMETERY DANCE: I do too. I've been reading them for, God, thirty years now.

BARKER: Yeah, yeah, we're both confirmed, we'll never be tempted out of it.

CEMETERY DANCE: I don't think so. I think I asked you this last year when we talked, but I'll ask again. Have you gotten to the point where you'd be able to write some of these yourself?

BARKER: I'd give you the same answer as last year. I don't think so.



I mean, I watch over them and provide the concepts, but the chances of actually having the time to spend writing or drawing is just impossible. I have movies lined up, I have a TV series lined up, I have more books lined up. And while there are people like Dan Chichester and Paul Johnson, people doing wonderful work, it seems like I'm better placed just watching over these things and being sort of the pump primer, providing the ideas which they can then go on and develop.

CEMETERY DANCE: Okay. And that leads us into the next thing I wanted to discuss -- movies. The last time I spoke with you was just before "Nightbreed" came out. What's on the horizon?

BARKER: Well, a whole bunch of things. "Hellraiser III" has just finished shooting, although I have nothing to do with it except that I know everybody involved in the project, and I have high hopes for the project. They finished in North Carolina last Saturday.

CEMETERY DANCE: Is anyone

from the other two involved?

BARKER: Oh, yes; Ashley Lawrence from the first picture has a cameo in it, and Doug Bradley as Pinhead is back in a major role. Pete Atkins, who wrote Number 2, wrote Number 3 and also plays a Cenobite in Number 3. Bob Keane, who also did the special effects for "Nightbreed" and the other two "Hellraisers" did the effects on Number 3. Keith Hardy, who designed "Nightbreed" for me designed Number 3. So there's a whole slew of people who were involved in the other two. The director is Tony Hickox, who did "Waxwork;" it's a team of people that I know and have high hopes for.

This last Monday, "Candy Man," which is based upon "The Forbidden," a short story from *The Books of Blood*, started shooting in Chicago, and comes to LA next week for shooting, starring Virginia Madsen and directed by Bernard Rose, who made a really rather wonderful short for-scale movie called "Paperhouse" awhile back. So that's shooting in Chicago at the moment.

And my next stint as executive producer and director will be in the spring of next year, which will be a movie for Universal called "Eden USA," which I have written.

CEMETERY DANCE: What's the status on the remake of "The Mummy?"

BARKER: Mick Garris and I were just talking about that yesterday. Mick has been finishing up on "Sleepwalkers -- "

CEMETERY DANCE: And you're in that.

BARKER: Yeah, I have a cameo, that's right. I have three lines; no, two lines!

CEMETERY DANCE: I've read the screenplay (by Stephen King); who are you in it?

BARKER: I don't think I even appear in the screenplay. I'm probably an addition, an addendum on page 58 or something. But I have the part of the coroner; Tobe Hooper and I both play coroners. And it was great fun to do. I have the experience, for that short a time, that David Cronenberg had in "Nightbreed," you know, of actually seeing what it was like from the other side. And it was kind of fun.

But Mick and I will get back to "The Mummy" pretty soon, probably when he's finished up his chores on "Sleepwalkers." And then we'll see where we go.

CEMETERY DANCE: So that's a ways off yet.

BARKER: Yeah, I think so.

CEMETERY DANCE: You mentioned you had some television projects in the works, too.

BARKER: Well, we've been talking about doing some of the short stories for TV. The TV stuff is under wraps, I can say no more than that we're planning to take this stuff into TV-land. The old anxieties always raise themselves about what you can and can't do on TV, and generally speaking, horror fiction, I don't think, prospers on TV.

CEMETERY DANCE: Not often anyway.

BARKER: I mean, I thought the first half of "IT" was wonderful, but the second half of "IT" was not good. Once you kick into the stuff which has to really compete with the movies, when you get to the big special effects numbers and so on, TV just can't live up to it. They don't have the resources.

And you can't be as horrific. That's the other problem. You can't horrify people as graphically on the small screen as you can on the large.

CEMETERY DANCE: That leads us back into books. Where do you go

from *Imajica*, other than the ones we've already talked about?

BARKER: Well, I'll probably do these two short books, *Everville* and the fable book, before I start my work on the next movie. Then I'll do "Eden USA" and then I'll do another novel. I'm not sure what it will be yet. But it will be another big fantasy novel. Certainly the hard-core horror stuff won't be -- I won't be doing any of that for a while.

There is the possibility of going back to it at some point or other, but it's not high on my agenda.

CEMETERY DANCE: Are the other books of the Art in the offing?

BARKER: Oh, absolutely. Yes. Before the end of the century, I promise!

(Laughter all around)

BARKER: I feel as though *Great and Secret Show* was complete unto itself, it was a complete narrative. There will be subsequent books. But I feel I have to follow where my imagination is telling me to go, and so I always follow that and follow that instinctively. And who knows? The possibilities are endless. I certainly feel as though I've just begun the kind of imaginative explorations which I've always been obsessed with.

For the last eight years, seven years, I've been publishing in this country, have been full of new directions and new possibilities. And I find those possibilities and directions just growing larger all the time. I don't feel the options narrowing, I feel them widening, which is exciting.

CEMETERY DANCE: The publicity material listed *Everville* as being the fable book. I gather from what you just said that they're two different books.

BARKER: They're two different books. And that's because they got it wrong! No, that's because the fable

book only came into close focus really like three weeks ago, when Harper-Collins in England offered me a deal to do it. So *Everville* is one book, and the fable book will be the other.

CEMETERY DANCE: Can you tell us a little bit about that one then?

BARKER: Only that it's a short book, that it will be illustrated, not by me, but we're talking with a bunch of illustrators at the moment. It has its dark side -- it's a short dark fable. I think fable is literally the best word for it, in that it has a moral, and it has a kind of moral underpinning to it, and it's a story which I've wanted to write for a long time. So that's gone along on its merry way. And I'll turn that in to them sometime in the spring of next year.

CEMETERY DANCE: Well, it certainly sounds like you're going to be busy.

BARKER: Yeah, it'll keep me off the streets for a while, that's for sure.

CEMETERY DANCE: Over the course of this interview and the last one, you've used terms like "mythology" and "fable" in describing what you do; do you see yourself as making a conscious effort to give your work at least, in the various genres into which it might fall or cross over, a little more class or whatever than a lot of things that are being written today?

BARKER: I think the problem with commercial fiction is that it's become kind of soulless, in a way. I know that there are a lot of writers writing science fiction, writing horror fiction, writing fantasy fiction, who are writing things they don't even believe. Now I don't mean believe in the sense that I believe Cenobites really exist, I don't. But I do believe that the moral and philosophical underpinnings of my books are things that I would defend in an

argument.

And I did a speech recently at the Horror Writers of America gathering, and I said, "We bitch about the fact that we don't get taken serious account of in academic or critical circles, and yet so often, as a genre, horror fiction leans so readily on predigested ideas, predigested solutions, many of which, as writers, we don't believe in."

The non-Christian, for instance, who is too happy to trot out the holy water and the crucifix when it's convenient; the atheist who is willing to summon up all kinds of magical powers if he or she feels that it's going to give some sort of superficial glamor to his or her story -- these are things which immediately demote the artwork, the book, or the movie which is a consequence of this kind of creation. Because if you are a so-called mainstream writer, you would expect to be answerable to the beliefs which were put forward in the book. And belief systems are one of the things which underpin fantastic fiction.

To then sort of put all your own personal beliefs on hold in order to write the book seems nonsensical, but I know that there are writers in horror and fantasy fiction who are doing that sort of thing all the time. You have to pour yourself into it, it has to be a confessional; it has to be something you truly believe, on some level or other you have to believe it.

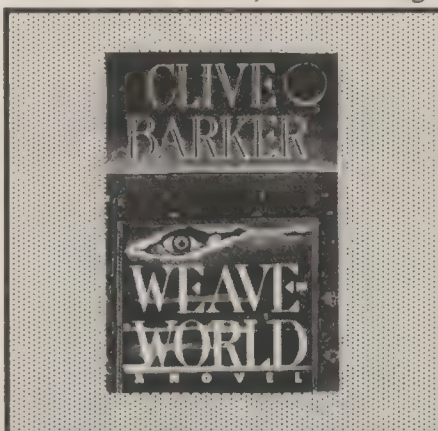
And so, in my cleaving to the fabulous, to the mythological, I am saying that my commitment is toward something which is larger than the casual entertainment, trying to produce something which has got some lasting value. Whether I'm succeeding or not -- well, we'll all be dead before anyone makes a judgment about that! But nevertheless, that's what I'm trying to do -- I'm trying to make something worthy in a genre which I love, that has some value, that is not simply disposable entertainment.

CEMETERY DANCE: I guess the word I might have been looking for

when I first asked the question was that you were trying to make things a little more literary than most of the work there, in the sense of dealing with serious themes.

BARKER: Yes, yes, absolutely. A character dies of AIDS in *Imajica*. There are hopefully some serious philosophical points, maybe theological points addressed in the book. The issue of feminism is one that has come up many times in my fiction. In fact, one of the reviews of *Imajica* mentions that I am very much trying to push forward a matriarchal mythos, as has become quite apparent by the time you get to the end of the book.

Those issues are serious issues, are things which fantastic fiction can address, and at the risk of sounding like a broken record, it's something



which writers in the fantastic genre are too nervous to address. Many of the writers coming to this genre come in because they want to escape. They don't want to write about realism. They want to write about things which they can invent.

But the things that they invent stand for things. They mean things, they have metaphorical value. And not to address what the metaphorical value of that thing is, is to flee from what makes this material powerful in the first place.

CEMETERY DANCE: It seems at least that writers are starting to move toward that in general. Even though he eschews that in interviews, I think

that Steve (King) is starting to do that with *Needful Things*.

BARKER: But you have to be naked in standing up and saying that, I think it's important to say, "Yes, I believe in this genre, yes I believe that it can passionately work on many levels, that it can aspire to the condition of art, that it needn't just be a popular entertainment; that it can have some lasting value." You have to say that.

CEMETERY DANCE: Certainly it started that way, with *Frankenstein*, and --

BARKER: Sure! *Frankenstein* is at least as much a philosophical treatise as it is a work of narrative fiction. And I would go to a much earlier example. I would go to the kind of material which is influential upon *Imajica*, stuff like *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Gulliver's Travels*. I mean, to take two very different pieces of work, one with a social/satirical intention, the other with a theological intention, both of which use very complex and layered worlds, fantastically created worlds, to press their points, both of which are written in deadly serious tone. There are other, much much earlier examples; you could go back to *Piers Plowman*; you could go back to portions of Chaucer, whatever. There is a long, pre-novel tradition. You could go back to Milton, or "The Tempest," or "A Midsummer Night's Dream;" material which uses fantastical images and ideas as a means to talk about the real world.

And we have become cowards in this genre. And I hate that; we will not stand up for what is our tradition. It's ours, you know.

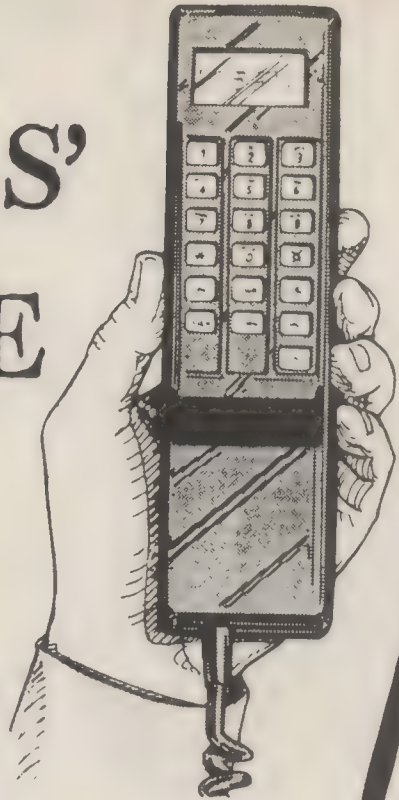
CEMETERY DANCE: It'll be interesting to watch people do it, and then it'll be hailed as a brave new direction in horror -- going back to the beginning!

BARKER: Exactly!

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THE EVIL EYE OF DARIO ARGENTO

DOUGLAS E. WINTER

An exclusive preview of Douglas E. Winter's "Opera of Violence: The Films of Dario Argento"—from CUT! HORROR WRITERS ON HORROR FILM, edited by Christopher Golden . . . Coming from Berkley Books in April 1992.

In the mid-1980's, Dario Argento was approached by the Sferisterio Theatre of Macerata to direct a stage version of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. When word of his rather sordid plans for the opera created something of a scandal, he was replaced by a more traditional director. (It was not the first time that Argento's ventures into the mainstream were met with controversy: In 1986, at the invitation of fashion designer Trussardi, Argento directed a promotional video in which runway models were stabbed to death and dragged away in bodybags.) But the seed of his next film had been planted: "It was the look backstage at Sferisterio which excited me -- all greymovement, dramatic lighting and never knowing what was lurking in the shadows."

The result, cowritten with Franco Ferrini, was *Opera* (1987), what Argento calls "an aria of violence beyond imagination." Aggressively decorated and filmed, it is a virtual showcase of modern camera technique and equipment. Argento used his first non-Italian director of photography, Ronnie Taylor -- Richard Attenborough's favorite cameraman and winner of an Oscar for *Ghandi* -- and the result is a visual splendor rarely obtained in the cinema of the macabre.

Ian Charleson plays a director of horror films slated to stage that most haunted of operas, Verdi's *Macbeth*. Life imitates art: Vanessa Redgrave stormed off the set of *Opera* in the manner of the fictitious opera's prima donna, leaving Argento to create a brilliant opening scene where the camera replaces her, the story shot entirely from her point-of-view . . . until she is struck by a car, raising the curtain on her understudy, the ingenue Betty (Cristina Marsilach).

Betty's debut as a pistol-toting Lady Macbeth, standing watch over a wasteland of crashed airplanes, smokestained soldiers, and a cascade of ravens, is a resounding success; but there is an operatic phantom lurking somewhere in the shadows. He is a vicious and fetishistic killer who has engineered Betty's debut, but for reasons that would be utterly alien to Gaston Leroux's romantic Phantom: It is not Betty, but her role -- as Lady Macbeth and, as the viewer learns in time, surrogate for her dead mother -- that holds this phantom in thrall.

In *Opera*, the act of seeing is fatal. The phantom (not unlike Argento himself) compulsively forces his audience of one, Betty, to witness his deeds; Betty's agent (Daria Nicolodi) is killed while staring through an apartment peephole; and the identity of the killer is known only to the ravens, who, like the camera, can speak to us only through their eyes. Indeed, the film's climax adopts the finale of Thomas Harris's novel *Red Dragon* (1981), which had been re-

jected in Michael Mann's film adaptation, *Manhunter* (1986), reaffirming Argento's obsessive warning that what is seen, like that which is not seen, cannot be believed.

Even the mysterious killer proves nothing but a mad pawn of vision, his murderous spree inspired by his mistress, Betty's mother, a voyeur who commanded him to kill for her. When his eye is plucked out by the swirling ravens, Argento's most Biblical retribution, we learn that the killer is the police inspector (Urbano Barberini). "Look at me," he cries: "A monster!"

Argento thus takes the *giallo* full circle: The police are criminals, the sinners saints, and in the film's closing moments the viewer finds Betty's protestations -- "I'm not like my mother, not at all" -- less than convincing. Notably, the generally available English language version, sometimes known as *Terror at the Opera*, concludes as a freeze-frame captures Betty after this denial of her capacity for violence; but in the Italian theatrical release, Argento's finale is optimistic. The scene continues into a fantasia as Betty falls to the ground, and on hands and knees embraces the flowers, the grass, the dirt, finally urging a salamander to "go free."

Argento's most recent work is a collaboration with George A. Romero, *Due occhi diabolici* ("Two Evil Eyes") (1990), a film in two parts in which each director adapts a story by Edgar Allan Poe. It is the long-awaited outcome of the directors' first collaboration, more than a dec-

ade before, on *Dawn of the Dead* (1979), Romero's sequel to his zombie classic *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). As producer and script consultant for *Dawn of the Dead*, Argento's contributions primarily involved financing, the screenplay, and the Goblin score; he also supervised the European edit ("Zombi"), which is slightly shorter than the American cut and has a juiced-up soundtrack.

Two Evil Eyes opens with Romero's segment, *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*. It proves surprisingly tepid, little more than a big-budget episode of his television series *Tales From the Darkside*, and may be the reason that the film has not been widely released in the United States. Argento's *Il gatto nero* ("The Black Cat"), on the other hand, is outrageous, compelling and, along with Federico Fellini's *Toby Dammit* in *Tre passi nel delirio* ("Spirits of the Dead") (1968), among the very best of the countless Poe-derived films.

Harvey Keitel plays Rod Usher, a photographer based loosely on Wee Gee, the "Naked City" lensman of 1940s New York murder scenes. Usher's obsession with scenes of horror mirrors Argento's own: An editor urges him to photograph something other than death, to "show the skeptics you've got an eye." But Usher is haunted by, indeed addicted to, the imagery of violence. A black cat appears mysteriously on his doorstep and is adopted by his live-in girlfriend, Annabel (Madeleine Potter). The cat seems to stalk him, taunt him, like the conscience he apparently lacks. Usher's attempts to photograph the cat twist into a compulsion, and finally he tortures and kills it for the eye of the camera.

When the photographs feature prominently in Usher's latest book, Annabel decides to move out; but the cat, proverbially, has come back. In a drunken stupor, Usher kills Annabel and walls up her corpse (and, unknowingly, the cat) inside his house. When the police arrive to investigate Annabel's disappearance, the cries

of the cat become the tell-tale heart by which Usher's crimes are revealed.

While Argento traditionally aligns his artist/detectives with the forces of good -- even *Tenebrae*'s Peter Neal mimes righteousness and, in his own twisted way, pursues it -- Rod Usher is bad to the bone, the inevitable conclusion of Argento's inward-spiraling tour of the destructive side of creativity. "It is the depravity that's in all of us," Usher says during the film's opening credits. "Perversity is one of the prime impulses of the heart. Who's never done something wrong just because it was forbidden? To be evil only for the love of being evil . . ."

The black cat of countless lives is more than Usher's conscience -- the white spot at its throat echoes the ever-watchful neighborhood priest, who is black, and thus white only at the collar. Argento suggests that more primal forces are at work, that bad luck indeed is caused by something more than broken minds, evil and good coexisting in an eternal struggle for balance. In the painfully bleak finale, Argento ups the ante of this much-adapted tale: The black cat was pregnant, and gave birth inside the walled tomb; its young have survived by feeding upon Annabel's corpse. Once he is found out, Usher's escape proves impossible. Although he kills the investigating policemen, he has been handcuffed to one of them and loses the key. When he tries to leave through an upper window, he falls, suspended in an agonized purgatory between sky and earth, heaven and hell, literally the hanged man of the Tarot.

The image befits Dario Argento as his film career enters the 1990s: Like Usher, he is an artist whose singular obsessiveness has left him hanging in the balance. Commercial and critical success have eluded him, at least when measured by the new Hollywood's mania for shopping mall audience acceptance, self-serving awards and quotable reviews. Each new film seems damned to a kind of purgatory for

Argento's effort to elevate his violent concerns -- and, with them, horror film itself -- to an artform.

Nevertheless, in his native Italy, Argento is a cultural icon, his identification with things horrific on a level as lofty as that reached by Stephen King in America. His likeness can be found on a regularly published comic magazine, *Profondo Rosso*, and his production company owns a chain of shops by the same name, devoted to horror and science fiction merchandise. He has directed and starred in a television commercial for Fiat, and served as a contributor or creative consultant to three television series, *La Porta sul Buio*, *Giallo*, and *Turno di notte*.

Having recently celebrated more than twenty years of filmmaking, Dario Argento is this generation's most pervasive influence on the film of mystery and horror. Certainly he has changed the look and intensity of these genre like no one since Hitchcock. His films read like a veritable sourcebook for the commercial American thriller cinema of the late Seventies and Eighties: *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* clearly influenced the elevator murder in Brian De Palma's *Dressed to Kill*, and the killer's hacking through the door in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), among many other lesser films. John Carpenter's *Halloween* borrows freely from *Il gatto a nove code* and *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio*, and the latter film provided the blueprint for the slow motion decapitation in Richard Donner's *The Omen* (1976). The coloration of *Suspiria* and *Inferno* influenced George A. Romero's *Creepshow* (1982) and, in turn, Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* (1990). The loutish crane shot in *Tenebrae* was replicated in De Palma's *The Untouchables* (1987). And the list could go on and on.

The Argento touch can be found in films as disparate as Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973), Lucio Fulci's *Sette note in nero* ("The Psychic") (1977) and . . . *E tu vivrai*

nel terrore! *L'Aldila* ("The Beyond"/"Seven Doors of Death") (1981), Carlo Vanzina's *Sotto il vestito niente* ("Nothing Underneath") (1985), Donald Cammell's *The White of the Eye* (1977), Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* (1987), and the Coen brothers' oeuvre -- most recently, *Barton Fink* (1991) -- not to mention the emerging Hong Kong cinema of terror, including Tsui Hark's *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987). Argento's assistant directors and collaborators have moved on to substantial careers of their own, within and without of his shadow -- not only Luigi Cozzi and Lamberto Bava, but more recently Michele Soavi, whose

debut in *Deliria* ("Aquarius"/"Bloody Bird"/"Stage Fright") (1986) was followed by the magnificent *La Chiesa* ("The Church") (1990) and *La Setta* ("The Sect") (1991), the latter films produced and cowritten by Argento.

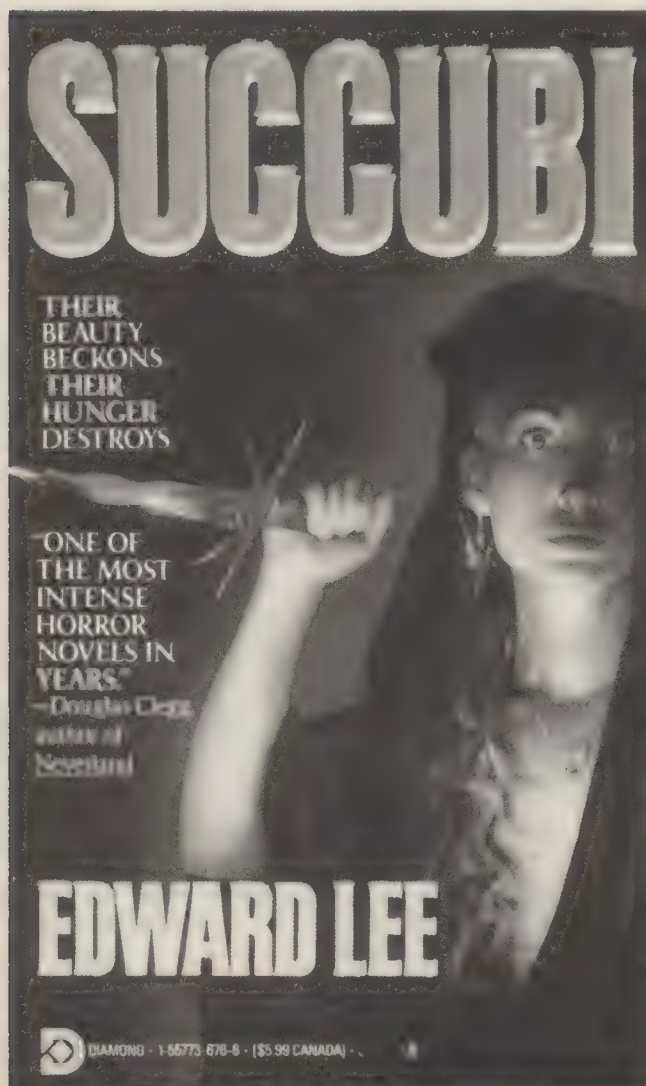
The unmade Argento films are intriguing to ponder. Early in his career, he sought repeatedly, without success, to option Agatha Christie's *Three Blind Mice*. After completing *Suspiria*, he discussed a remake of *The Phantom of the Opera*. He allegedly turned down Stephen King's *The Stand*, and more recently proposed a version of *Frankenstein* set in Nazi Germany. And, of

course, speculation continues about when, if ever, he will make the finale of his "Three Mothers" trilogy.

Where Dario Argento's camera will turn next is uncertain at this writing, but one thing is clear: He will show us things that we have never seen.

Douglas E. Winter
Alexandria, VA
August 1991

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E. Winter



A NEW NOVEL OF EROTIC TERROR BY THE AUTHOR OF *COVEN & INCUBI*

ANGELS OF LOVE

Long sleek legs, siren faces, flawless naked bodies
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DIAMOND MARCH 1992

TITLE: SUCCUBI

AUTHOR: Edward Lee

PRICE: \$4.50/\$5.99 Can ISBN: 1-55773-676-6

PAGES: 272 SPINE: 11/16"

CARTON: 50 CATEGORY: Horror, 04



THE NUMBERS QUIZ

A.R. Morlan

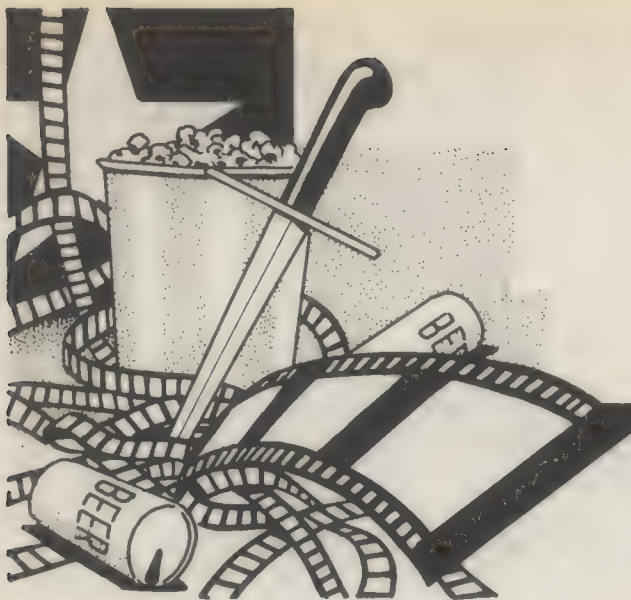
Attention all horror-loving math buffs! This quiz is for you . . . as well as for the folks (like yours truly!) who can't tell a Venn diagram from a bar graph. The equation which has to be solved is this: match the appropriate 16 numbers -- the ones listed in the bottom column -- with the twenty short story and novel *titles* they belong with. (Stumped? Here's a clue: you can use the numbers more than once, if necessary. It is indicated below how many times each number is used). SCORING: Give yourself one point for each correct answer. Four or under: Fair; 5-9 correct: Good; 10-14 correct: Very good; 15 and over: you are definitely a "10"!

1. "The Odyssey of Flight _____" Rod Serling
2. "_____ Night Out" Frank Belknap Long
3. "The Crest of _____" Davis Grubb
4. *Fahrenheit* _____ Ray Bradbury
5. "_____ Life, Furnished in Early Poverty" Harlan Ellison
6. "Lot No. _____" Arthur Conan Doyle
7. "Baby is _____" Theodore Sturgeon
8. "_____ at Table" Lord Dunsay
9. "Nightmare at _____ Feet" Richard Matheson
10. "_____ For the Road" Stephen King
11. "The _____ - Year Picnic" Ray Bradbury
12. "_____ Wind" Richard Christian Matheson
13. "The Beconing Fair _____" Oliver Onions
14. _____ *Years of Solitude* Gabriel Garcia Marquez
15. "Jeffy is _____" Harlan Ellison
16. "_____ O'Clock" Price Day
17. "In the _____ Year of the War" Harlan Ellison
18. "_____ From the Sun" Richard Matheson
19. "_____ Ghosts in Hamlet" Fritz Leiber
20. "_____ Hour" Ray Bradbury

Select from:

Zero	Third (2)	Thirteen	249
One (3)	Four (2)	33	451
Second	Fourth	Thirty-six	20,000
Three	Five	One Hundred	Million

(Quiz answers on page 104)



JOE R. LANSDALE
& DAVID E. WEBB

TRASH THEATRE

LEATHERFACE: THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE 3

82 (long) minutes

Starring: William Butler

Viggo Mortensen

Tom Everett

Kate Hodge

R. A. Mihajloff

Director: Jeff Burr

Written by: David Schow

The *Texas Chainsaw* title is sacred stuff to Texans and dyed-in-the-wool horror fans. Stories using this title must be handled with respect and with the correct attitude*(1).

Not too different from a treasured family story handed down from one generation to another about how old grandma choked to death at the dinner table on a pork chop bone and that the impromptu tracheotomy performed by grandma's nephew with a butter knife was a noble, but futile, not to mention blood-in-the-butter effort, that resulted in a family disdain for pork chops or the sight of a pig to this day.

And by golly, David Schow, the screen writer for *Leather Face: Texas Chainsaw 3*, approached this sequel with the proper reverence. He was so insistent on having the right info, the right feel, he came to

Cosmic Nacogdoches, Texas to suck in a little Texas air, meet a few armadillos ("Hey, how you doin'? How's it hangin'? That your shell? Neat."), and hang out at Joe Lansdale's house, eat chili and tamales, and he actually finished the script for the picture show right in Lansdale's study. He was a credit to the *Chainsaw* legend.

We, your erstwhile reviewers, read it.

It was dark.

It was ugly.

It was bloody.

It was full of degenerates.

We had high hopes.

Ha!

Went to see that buddy when it showed up in Nacogdoches, Texas, and, well, it was sort of like being prepared for great sex only to discover there was a hole in your only rubber.

Actually, we had developed suspicions early on. Our first worry was when we heard Schow was not happy with "suggestions" made by the Powers That Be concerning changes in the script. Now Schow can be cantankerous, that must be admitted, but he has a love for low budget films and a desire to do it right, and in the spirit of the original, so we felt if Schow was worried, we should be a little worried, too.

We're not saying some of the

changes suggested to Schow were bad ones, but the largest percentage of them were designed to sanitize to the point of stupidity. There definitely seemed to be a wrong attitude developing early on amongst the work-for-hire team supervising the movie. Interviews with the director, Jeff Burr and actress Kate Hodge made us nervous. They tossed around words like "art" and "I don't like horror movies."

Reading stuff like that, you kinda wondered why they wanted to get involved in this sort of project anyway. We are reminded of the Lansdale story "The Pit" (reminded because Lansdale is co-writing this article and wanted to get his licks in and didn't care if by doing so the article rambled, but what you gonna do with the guy), which was optioned for film -- a grim story about a bizarre town where a captured black truck driver is forced, on a regular basis, to fight another captured traveler.

It's a darkly humorous tale. Has points to make about the evils of racism, about living your life to the fullest, and may not be worth a shit -- that's up to readers to decide -- but you assume that if it was optioned, it was because the person optioning the property liked the story or novel and wanted to see it represented on film.

You assume that, you assume wrong.

Normally, once a property is optioned for film, our would be producer then hires a screenplay writer, or becomes a writer his or herself, and a screenplay is written, making sure everything that attracted the producer in the first place (even if the screen writer is the producer his ownself) is taken out, and an "original" is developed.

For example, the script for "The Pit" became a story about a car salesman, yuppiism, consumerism, and it has a happy ending that came out of the air in a sudden rush, like a long held fart. Fast and loud with an unpleasant odor.

In other words, the screenplay didn't have shit to do with the story, or what little it did have to do with the story was only there as a sad reminder that an original story once existed. Lansdale feels the producer is talented and truly liked the story and wanted to make it, but wanted to make it so bad he got cold feet about trying to make it in the spirit of the source material. Certainly, to flesh a short story into a screenplay, additional material was needed, but it would have been nice if the additional material had been written in the spirit of the story. The result: Another teen date movie. Nothing special. If we're lucky, it won't get made.

Our question is this: Why option something you don't intend to make in the first place? Be it based on a Lansdale story, or the dear ole' *Chainsaw* name and tradition.

Why take an established concept like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (thought we'd forgotten the movie, didn't you?) and try to make it into something it isn't? We ain't against changes. Going in new directions. Being artful. But we are against turning one of the funniest and scariest horror series ever developed into an acceptable teen date movie.

Why take on a project you obviously hate and try to turn it into another thing altogether -- and then

fail at either end? It ain't art, and it ain't good entertainment. And it damn sure ain't a combination of the two. It's a standard horror movie where the makers had high hopes of marketing toys from the characters. You could almost imagine the creators mentally visualizing the Leatherface dolls on the K-Mart shelves, right next to Kens and Barbies and Mr. Potato Heads. You know, you pull a string and Leatherface's saw fires up and you can chase your friends around the block with it.

Come on, you hear the words *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, immediately we're not thinking of Godard, or even Stephen Spielberg. Instead, you visualize a lot of gratuitous violence, gore for gore's sake -- filming the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* without gore for gore's sake, is like filming Ghandi without peace for peace sake -- and a sick black humor aimed at the lowest common denominator. Or, to put it another way, these movie makers fucked up our fun.

What came out was a non-Texan, wimpy, not funny, Hollywood horror teen date movie. A shitty picture show forced to toss out its leather pants and faded blue jean shirt, and go out into the world sporting pink underpants with lace trim and a pair of rainbow colored flip-flops.

Oh, there are some nice elements. The disturbing body pit. Over the top cartoon violence. The sets look nasty. Kate Hodge is a lot better to stare at than the burning face of the sun.

But, cliches are as thick as the head cheese on a one-eye'd ogre's dick. Such as the car failing to start at a crucial moment, and . . . Well, too many.

This one doesn't have "Nam Boy" or the "Rolling Grill" or anything of its equivalent.

It doesn't have dick.

If the director had been truer to Schow's script, it might not have been art, a classic, but it would certainly have been more artful and would have pulled the right chains for those who like movies that glee-

fully walk the line between bad taste and worse. Instead, by trying to offend no one, and please everyone, they came out with a tv movie with cuss words and a little blood.

As for snacks, if you do decide to watch this one, please don't eat barbecue with it. Wrong snack.

Try cold quiche eaten with a plastic spoon from a paper cup.

EATEN ALIVE (Also known as *LEGEND OF THE BAYOU*)

96 minutes

Virgo International Pictures

Starring: Neville Brand

Mel Ferrer

Carolyn Jones

Marilyn Jones

William Finley

Stuart Whitman

Robert Englund

Director: Tobe Hooper

Written by: Alvin L. Fast and Mardi Rustam

Adapted for screen by: Kim Henkel (Meaning, a lot of folks fucked with this one.)

(A note to readers: Small portions of this review are courtesy of a previous review written by Joe R. Lansdale for the now defunct magazine, *The Horror Show*. We felt Mr. Lansdale's comments on *Eaten Alive* were still highly relevant, and it seemed like a way we could get the column written by doing less original work. Thank you.)

This one is shit.

Good shit.

We liked it.

We loved it.

I mean you got a picture show starts out with the face of Robert Englund -- or to be more precise, the nose of Robert Englund, because this is an Extreme Close Up and Englund has him a serious nose -- and you have Englund saying these classic, well-scripted lines, "My name is Buck, and I'm rarin' to fuck," you know immediately you are visually bound on

a journey into sophisticated entertainment. Masterpiece Theater never had it so good. (This, by the way, was Englund's first role. Well before he became the infamous Freddy.)*(2)

And can you believe this? For some unknown reason, Hooper wanted his name taken off the credits. We can't see why. With a cast of this sort and Hooper's merciless view of The White Trash Factor and a Close Up of Englund's nose, the result is wonderfully bizarre and psychotic, a little like neighbors Dave and Joe have had in the past.

This one takes place in Deep East Texas (where Dave and Joe live) at the Starlight hotel, a real hot spot, and it has all the nastiness of *Chainsaw* and the added benefit of a sound stage that looks like a goddamn sound stage. We wonder if the designer for this set spent some time in an East Texas insane asylum.

Jud, the inn keeper, is a real charmer. Sleazy, with clothes so nasty looking you can almost smell the sweat and pee stains through your television set. Even creepier, we've known guys like this one. Not just poor, which is not always a person's fault, but mean and ignorant and proud of it. Hooper and the screen writers have the type down perfectly. So perfectly, many viewers will find Jud a gross exaggeration of the truth. Only thing is, in real life, these guys are a gross exaggeration of reality. You can't believe they exist, but they do.

They're that sad kind of poor folk called White Trash, meaning they're not only poor, but trash by choice, and they're mean, because the Poor White Trash is the saddest minority on earth, though the word minority here is not to be taken in the way it is used for the poor in general, blacks, Mexicans, Orientals, etc.

Unlike other minorities, the White Trash is a failure through happy ignorance, laziness and design, and can't understand the problem is their own fault. And if it isn't their fault, it's hard to give a shit because they're such mean fucks.

Really mean, brethren, because being white, in their eyes, means they have no excuse for being poor. They can understand why "niggers," "kikes," or any other minority group can be a failure, because they perceive these groups as inferiors produced by God so White Trash will have someone to hate, but can't understand why they, one of God's chosen White Folks, has the I.Q. of a brick and no Cadillac. In their view, a minority rises out of the shit, it's because the "gubment" gave them a check or because Civil Rights laws are offering the no accounts a hand-out. But, curiously, they can't see anything wrong when they, their own selves, collect a check for "back ailments" that only re-occur at the prospect of a job.

Jud is just this sort of character.

Back to the sets, and while we're on them, let's toss in some business about the supporting animal characters and the sound track.

Check out the small cage on the hotel's sagging front porch with a sick monkey in it. The porch gives one the feel of a ship's deck, perhaps to tie in Jud as a kind of Ahab, and his crocodile -- we'll discuss the reptile in a moment -- as a kind of Moby Dick.

The monkey cage is a great prop, so goddamn nasty looking you get the impression the only time it's cleaned is when the wind blows rain through it. You also get the impression that if the monkey gets to eat, it's because there's something lying around Jud won't eat, like coffee grounds or orange peelings. The monkey's role is brief, but he does a great death scene, dying early on, possibly of shame, and in the presence of an innocent child, of course, just to rub it in good.

There's also the aforementioned crocodile *(3) in a moat in front of the hotel. That's right, a croc, not a gator.

Let's hear Jud's comments on the big reptile. "Oh, oh, yuh seen it, huh? It ain't no ordinary gator, 'ats a

croc. Gator can't move fast lest it's in water. Ol' croc now ain't the same. Out run a horse! Got out of there one day and chased down a nigger's mule. Ha! Ha! Tore it half in two fore it hit the ground, front part still screamin'. Ha! Head and legs crawled fifty yards. Ol' Croc made no distinctions none at all. Ha! Ha!"

It's plain to see the croc has a bad attitude, and early on our reptilian thespian gobbles a little dog, Fluffy, setting a tone of cinematic perfection that continues to the end of this nasty little exercise in insanity.

You see, a dog gets it in a movie, you know you're in for some merciless business, as this is one of Hollywood's big taboos. Kids and dogs just about always survive -- especially dogs. They don't, you can figure some chances are being taken.

Note: even in the recent remake of *Cape Fear*, which is very good and for the most part mean as a snake, the dog dies, but it dies off stage and the whole incident is scooted over as quickly as possible. That's okay, doing it off stage, but in the same movie, when a woman is brutally beaten, as well as having a chunk of her face bitten off by a psychopath, we get that in loving detail. It's okay to show a human being tortured and mistreated for no reason other than meanness, but a filmmaker will scoot over the death of man's best friend faster than a stream of diarrhea can hit the toilet water, or will, better yet, avoid such an incident completely, or somehow show that the dog isn't really dead, even if a structure the size of the Empire State Building falls on it. To show that the dog survived, no matter how unlikely, a film maker might have his screen writer concoct a scene like this:

"Why goddamn, Fred, can you believe it? There must have been a little indentation there in the sidewalk when that building fell, and Fluffy just hunkered down and survived . . . Too bad about all them other people, couple thousand, I guess. Especially bad about that woman whose eyeballs popped out when the building

fell on her."

"Ain't that the truth, Billy. And I heard them eyeballs flew fifty yards and hit a feller in the head cross the street there, entered one of his ears and punctured his brain, ricocheted throughout his body and came out his asshole, knocked shit all over the front glass of that there Chinese Restaurant."

"That's some tough stuff all right, Fred, way all them folks died in the crash, and that fella getting an eyeball through his brain, but I tell you, something would have happened to that dog Fluffy, I'd have just been sick."

Dave and Joe have a sort of rule for good horror movies. The poodle (read any breed of dog or mutt) doesn't come back. A little doggie gets eaten in a good horror movie, you don't have him show up at the end a survivor, only wounded, or somehow miraculously brought back to life just in time to lick his master's face before the credits start to roll, and if you do kill the critter, you don't have its mate have puppies, and someone say, "Well lookee there, that little tyke looks just like Fluffy. See the way he's hustlin' up to the tit there. It's as if he's come back from the dead, reincarnated."

A little dog buddy bites the big one in a good horror movie, he stays bitten. If it's a poodle, you get extra points.

So, be forewarned, Fluffy's role in this movie is brief, and the only way he's going to come back is as a reptile turd. Okay?

The interior of the old hotel looks like the place shit goes to die. Bedrooms so ugly they make you think of suicide. Cold, slimey bathrooms where it appears the commode has run over many times after usage, and only the big particles and the toilet paper have been picked up. Kind of place you come into wearing flip flops, the floor will suck them off your feet. Put your bare feet on the floor, you can feel goo run up between your toes and start housekeeping.

The sound track is something of a character in the movie itself. It all comes to us through Jud's radio, and it plays constantly. Truly, and fabulously, irritating. Satirical pseudo Country and Western tunes about good cowboys and incest and all manner of bullshit if you listen close. A cassette of these tunes could really start your morning off right. Two Live Crew hasn't got a thing on this shit. You need to view this one with the sound turned up. It's as melodious as the screams of a dying rabbit.

Add to this the fact that Jud mumbles constantly, makes outbursts that somehow hint at child abuse and brutal religion, add in too the whining and sniveling of a neurotic husband, the fact that everyone talks and screams loudly, and you've got a movie that's not only stupid, but is somehow able to saw close to the bone; it makes you uncomfortable and entertains*(4) you at the same time; it's trash and it's corn and it has the feel of a human cartoon soaked in kerosene and burning rubber, but somewhere, at the base of its cancerous spine, it's oddly accurate and real.

Okay, we haven't said much about the non-animal characters except for Jud, but Jud and the animals are more interesting here, so we'll let that go. Also, we're coming to the end of our space, and we've forgotten to mention the plot, what plot there is.

It's the mood and the attitude that make this one work for us, and you might say the plot is that of a self-righteous man trying to do God's work as he sees it.

In summary: *Eaten Alive* has it all. Lots of murder and mayhem committed by crocodile teeth and nasty looking farm implements. Plenty of mumbling and bad music and wonderfully sometimes overlit, sometimes underlit sets. There's a sad nod toward Moby Dick and literature, a nod that becomes more obvious as the movie proceeds, and there's a good joke with BC headache powder that may be funny only to Southerners who've grown up with

television commercials for the products conducted by Country and Western singer Faron Young.

The movie's a piece of shit all right, but it's configurations are interesting, and you'll want to eyeball this turd for a long while before you flush it.

This concludes our usual rambling and free association. Next time, if all goes well, we'll be reviewing *Dolomite* and *The Human Tornado* and if space allows, offer a few comments on the nature of art and discuss a young lady who jams canned yams up her ass. (We're uncertain if they're still in the can or not.)

Until then, adios.

Footnotes 1-4

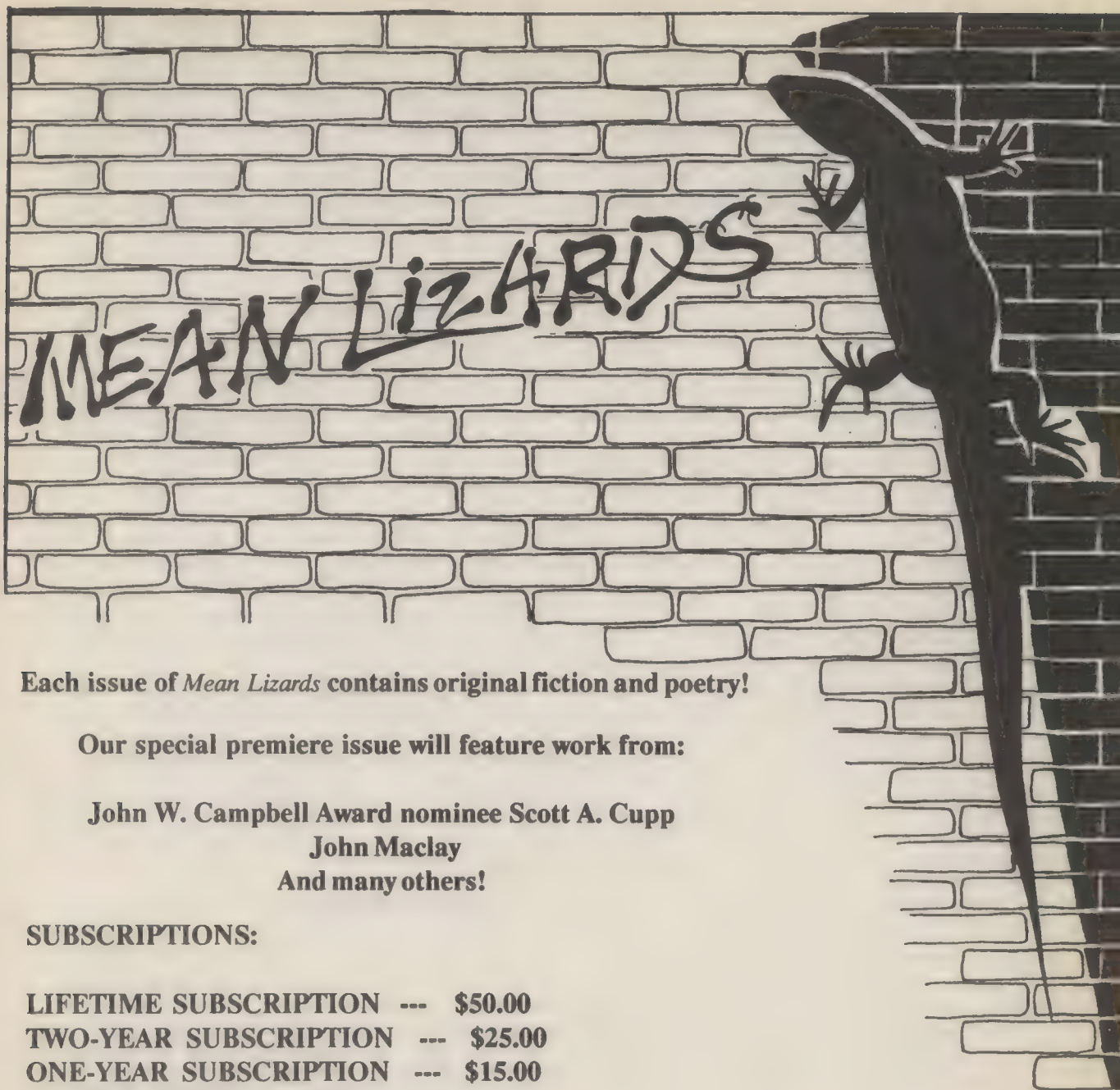
A Comment On The Footnotes:

Below are footnotes. We really didn't need them and could have commented on or explained all this in the above reviews, but a lot of really important smart writer people like us use them. It works the same way as Jud's croc works. Makes us feel important. (See footnote on crocodile (2) so this makes sense to you.)

1. We like to refer to it as Movie Correct. Meaning our opinion is correct and you should adopt it. The Politically Correct crowd insists on this, and we felt we should follow their self-righteous lead. It works for them, so it'll work for us. Correct? Of course we are.

2. Joe and Dave thought this opening over, and this isn't exactly how it opens, but goddamn, it should have. We seem to remember that nose in Close Up, and have decided to correct it here in the footnotes, but leave the impression the movie gave us in the column, as the impression one gets from a movie is equally as important as what you really saw. And it's a lot of trouble to revise.

(Con't on page 103)



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TRIAL BY FIRE

BARRY HOFFMAN

BARRY HOFFMAN was recently nominated for the World Fantasy Award for his excellent work with *Gauntlet*, an annual trade-paperback focusing on the many different aspects of censorship. The third edition of *Gauntlet* is due in a few short months. His short fiction has sold to/appeared in numerous publications and anthologies, including *Fear*, *Cold Blood*, *The Earth Strikes Back*, and *Castle Rock*. The following novella is Hoffman's fourth appearance in *Cemetery Dance*.

Word swept through town like a raging inferno. Stores closed; the diner emptied; patrons poured out of the pool hall and Cavanaugh's Bar.

"They've caught the fucker," said one.

"They're bringing him in now," echoed another.

"Praise the Lord," a third whispered, a nine week long nightmare apparently at an end.

They waited in fevered anticipation and a hush fell as Sheriff Everett Manders's slightly-battered Chevy police cruiser pulled in front of the station. Manders surveyed the crowd with some trepidation before he unveiled the suspect who held their rapt attention. An emotionally charged, volatile group of friends and neighbors, he thought, that could easily turn into a lynch mob. He wasn't looking forward to this confrontation. Sighing, he opened the back door and helped the handcuffed 19-year-old Lonnie Burkett out of the car.

"I knew it," bellowed Cecil Holloway, when he saw the youth. "Had to be him. He and his ain't one of us."

"Why'd you move here, you little shit?" cried Leila Wyche. "Why make our lives miserable?"

"The Devil's spawn," crowed Ethel Tanner, Reverend Ben Tanner's wife.

The crowd seemed to move as one, inching ever closer to Manders and the young arsonist. A spark was all that was needed to turn these normally placid people into a frenzied mob that would only be sated by Lonnie Burkett's blood. Manders had to act now before they were beyond reason.

"Hold it folks!" he said above the din. "We got us here a suspect . . . and only that. It's been hell on all of us, but I'm not about to let you take the law into your own hands. And I don't want to be arresting any of you for obstructing justice. Now let us pass."

While he'd been talking to all of the forty or so that had gathered, his eyes were fixed on Samuel Crum whose paper mill had gone up in flames four days earlier. At 6'4" and 250 pounds, Crum had it in his power to ease tensions or turn the crowd rabid. Crum stared at Manders, his face contorted in rage, fists balled so tight his knuckles were deathly pale. Crum looked at the man who'd been his friend since grade school, cursed to himself and shook his head in acknowledgement. As Manders moved towards him, the boy by his side, Crum let him pass.

"You should have arrested him a month ago," Crum said as he passed. "Could have saved us all heartbreak and grief."

"Knew it was him all along!" another shouted.

The sheriff ignored the catcalls that continued as he made his way to his office. He understood their rage only too well. Arson in a close-knit community like Elkins brought out the worst in everyone. Petty grudges became grounds for suspicion; friends, even relatives, looked at one another differently. *Anyone* could be the cause of the terror that filled them as they awaited the next inevitable fire. And Lonnie Burkett had been a suspect from the very beginning; albeit for no sound reason.

Nepotism was an established practice, born out of necessity and inertia, in Elkins as few left and fewer yet moved into the community of two hundred souls, give or take. A Dillard had been the town's mayor long as anyone could remember; a Lawson had run the weekly newspaper since it had opened; farmers passed their property to their children and most stores were owned by the descendants of those who had founded them. A Manders had been sheriff for three generations.

The Burketts, on the other hand, had moved in only a year before. Ethel Stinson had been a spinster. When she died and left her ramshackle cabin to some distant cousin, no one expected them to accept the meager inheritance. Less than a week later, however, Lonnie Burkett had moved in with his invalid father. The old man, a Korean War veteran, received a paltry disability check once a month. Lonnie did odd jobs to bring in additional money, mainly to feed the five dogs the old man kept for company.

In a town where gossip traveled like a tornado,

where all were an extended family of sorts, the Burketts stood out like a fox in a henhouse. When the fires began even Manders cast his eye on Lonnie. It was more comforting than to consider it might be a valued friend or neighbor. Suspecting and proving, however, were two entirely different propositions and Manders wasn't about to arrest the young man on conjecture alone. Proof hadn't surfaced until just three days before, too late to save Samuel Crum's paper mill, which employed four members of his family and 16 others -- all now joining at least eight others on the unemployment line. Manders still couldn't believe his daughter, Shelly, of all people had cracked the case.

He turned Burkett over to Alvin Lukins for booking. A Lukins had been deputy near as long as a Manders had been sheriff; none particularly bright, energetic or ambitious. Second banana, without the ultimate responsibility, had suited them just fine. Looked as though pretty soon a Lukins *would* become sheriff after all, Manders thought ruefully.

He suddenly felt lightheaded and was forced to sit down; the stress of the past nine weeks finally catching up. *No sense in kidding yourself*, he thought. It wasn't merely stress. His health had been in steady decline since the accident that had claimed his wife, Amanda, two years before. A few too many drinks; the temperature dipping without either of them noticing; the road icing up; the jeep skidding and sliding . . . striking a tree. Amanda dead and he in a coma for nearly a week with a severe concussion. He'd been back to work in less than a month, passing the fatigue and shortness of breath, that descended upon him like a suffocating blanket, as after-effects of the accident.

He'd been scared shitless, however, when he'd found himself driving aimlessly miles from town with no idea where he was going or, glancing at his watch, how three hours had slipped by. After the third such episode, he'd grudgingly gone to see his doctor. He'd been sent to a specialist in Philly for three days for tests.

Doc Fletcher had been blunt as always with his diagnosis, upon his return.

"There's nothing wrong with you that retirement won't cure."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean? I'm fifty-one. My father stayed on the job til he was near seventy and the same with his father before him."

"Neither of them slammed into a tree at forty miles per hour."

"That what them big-city doctors told you?"

"No. Them big-city doctors told me what you *didn't* have. No tumor, which is what I'd feared. In layman terms, when you hit that tree your brain bounced back and forth in your skull like a marble in a pinball machine. There was some permanent damage. Nothing life threatening if you start taking it easy. But, with the stress of your job . . ." He shrugged his shoulders.

" . . . the fatigue and the headaches . . ." Manders tried to finish for him but couldn't.

" . . . and the blackouts will continue and worsen. One day you'll be driving, go into one of your funks and instead of hitting a tree, you'll hit some kid or drive over a cliff."

"The timing's not right," Manders said.

"Never is," Fletcher said. "Look, Ev, in a year, Danny will be out of the Army. Let him take over. Hell, we all get old. I've been thinking of doing the same myself. Paul will finish his residency in six months. I figure it'll take all of two or three months before folks will want to be seeing him and not his old fart of a father."

"I'll think on it." He saw Fletcher eyeing him suspiciously. "Really, I will."

"For now cut back just a wee-bit. Let that deputy of yours -- the Lukins kid -- earn his pay. I'm serious, Ev. You got a lot of good years ahead of you. You'll have grandchildren pretty soon and you'll have the time to spend with them you didn't have for Danny and Shelly. Push yourself though . . ." He didn't need to finish the sentence.

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Manders bolted as the door slammed. He glanced at the clock. He'd been asleep for two hours. Or had he blacked out again? he wondered. He eyed his daughter as she came across the room with two trays stacked on top of each other.

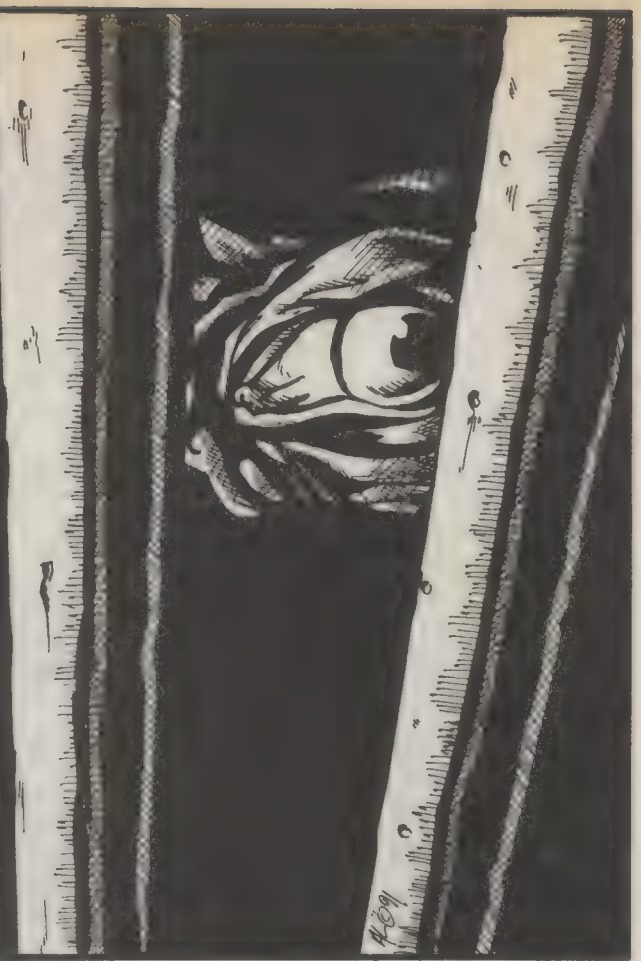
"Here's the salad you asked for. All right if I take Lonnie his supper?" She looked at him warily. "Are you okay?"

"Just dozed off for a minute there. You kinda caught me by surprise. Sure, you take the kid his supper." He paused and almost as an afterthought added, "You done real good, Shelly. I'm proud of you."

The girl smiled and left her father to his salad.

**

Damned right, I did good, Shelly thought as she passed three vacant cells; cells that remained unoccupied save for a few drunks who fought it out Friday or Saturday night. The fourth cell was Lonnie's. Shelly wondered at what she had ever seen in the man, though truth be told, she couldn't afford to be choosy. He was 5'7", the same as she, but wafer thin where she was "full bodied," her father's euphemism for hefty. Though twenty-three, he had a boyish face with acne still playing havoc with his complexion. His lips were thin, his nose pinched, his cheeks gaunt. What amazed her was the contrast between his thick straight blond hair and his utterly hairless face; not only no facial hair, but no eyebrows nor eyelashes. In one of God's cruel jokes she had too much of what he had too little. Her face was chubby; not even her



father could soften the description. Her nose was broad, her lips full -- possibly even sensuous, if she'd lost a bit of weight from the rest of her face. She too had a full head of hair -- jet black, but cropped short. Unfortunately, there was more than a trace of facial hair; full eyebrows, long lashes and a hint of a mustache. Plain, dour; certainly not repulsive but not one who could be choosy about accepting a date.

The two locked eyes for a moment; his pale gray penetrating, probing but devoid of emotion; hers a fiery blue that spoke of hidden passions and desires.

She silently slid the tray under the bars and turned to leave.

"Shelly, for the love of God, please help me," he said, his voice a whine that now grated on her nerves. "Someone's framed me. I ain't set no fires. You of all people *know* I couldn't do such a thing. Will you help me, please?" The last came out *pleeeeeease*.

She smiled and she could see a glimmer of hope rise within him.

"Save it for the judge, shithead." She turned, her coarse husky laughter filling the corridor. *Help him*, she thought to herself. *You little shit, if it wasn't for me you wouldn't be here.*

**

The need to pin the blame on Lonnie Burkett had

sprung from her father's decision to retire. Yes, she'd seen he'd become a shell of himself after her mother's death, but he thought he'd respond by throwing himself into his work with even greater intensity, if that were possible. And, while he'd been shaken to the core by Danny's death, five months before, retirement was the last thing she expected. Yet, three months ago, after he pushed his half-eaten supper away he announced his intentions.

"I'm planning on retiring, Shelly. Doc Fletcher's been on me about it for well over a year now and it's time I listened. I'd hoped Danny would take over . . ." The sentence went unfinished.

While she knew he didn't love her any less, Danny was his son and it was he who would pass on the Manders name. No, he didn't love her any less, but she was a girl. It had taken every ounce of her persuasion to allow her to work at the jail when Danny had joined the Army. Her father hadn't even given her an official position. She wasn't a deputy, though she patrolled the town at night when her father wasn't feeling up to it. Usually she did the grunge work; got meals for the few prisoners who visited their cells, ran errands, answered the phone and kept the office clean.

Her father had told her on more than one occasion how he looked forward to the patter of countless grandchildren; young'uns that would spring from *her* womb.

That was her role in life. But Danny had fucked things up by stepping on a land mine in the Persian Gulf in the closing hours of the triumphant Desert Storm. Even with his death, Shelly was certain her father would somehow rebound and remain sheriff until he was in his late-sixties, as had been the case for three generations.

"Who'll take your place?" she asked.

"Al Lukins, I reckon. He's adequate and he's got more ambition than his father."

"But a Manders has always been sheriff."

"There's nothing I can do about that now, is there? I'm too old to marry again, have a son, and wait for him to grow up. No, Lukins it'll have to be."

"What about me?"

"You can't be serious." He saw the hurt he'd inflicted, as she fought the tears that threatened to betray her emotions. "I mean, even if I could train you, this town isn't ready to accept a woman as sheriff. You know it as well as I do."

With the announcement his appetite seemed to return and he attacked his dinner with renewed vigor.

Shelly remained silent. No amount of talk, she knew, could change his mind. If she was to replace him she'd have to prove it by her deeds.

The opportunity presented itself a little over a month later.

♦♦

Shelly had been seeing Lonnie Burkett on the sly for two months. He'd been filling in as a cashier at Darwin's Diner; Ruth Darwin's appendix had ruptured, Lonnie had been between jobs -- a perfect match. Shelly would come over each day to order breakfast for her father, Al Lukins, and the occasional drunk who'd spent the night in the jail. Lonnie had a quick wit and didn't feel intimidated that she was the sheriff's daughter. He was no hunk, but being no prize catch herself she found herself soon flirting with him. The only problem was her father would never approve of their dating. Lonnie was an outsider. Worse he had no steady job, no ambition and no skills that could allow him to become part of the fabric of the community. When he'd asked her out her first impulse was to reject his overture. But she hadn't had more than two or three dates since her high school graduation over two years before and it wasn't as if he were a leper or an ex-con. She relented, but she'd have to meet him in Flourtown, six miles away where no one from Elkins was likely to be.

She was surprised how at ease she felt with him. She sensed he was as new at this as she was and they stumbled along together. He didn't hold her hand until their third date; didn't try to kiss her until the fifth. When he unsuccessfully tried to unhook her bra the eleventh time they went out she cracked up and he followed suit. She helped him and his whisking ever so gently across her

nipples brought out passions she had long kept bottled within her. She gave herself fully to him a week later. She wasn't in love -- not yet; maybe never, but she couldn't remember being happier.

Then the shit hit the fan. First, her father with his talk of retirement, then the fire at O'Connor's Service Station and then her period . . . her little friend who stopped visiting.

There'd been fires in Elkins; not many, but it wasn't as if she'd never witnessed one. But this was somehow different. A farmhouse burns down; another is built. Hell, even when there'd been a fire at the high school, they just closed one wing and moved classes to the church. But O'Connor's was totaled and with two other service stations in town, Sean O'Connor decided to take the insurance money and retire. It left two full-time employees out of work.

Tom Kerrigan, head of the volunteer fire department, had spent two years in Camden learning all about fires, accidental ones and those of suspicious origin, not that he'd have much use for the latter in Elkins. No sooner had he returned to Elkins than his father had stepped aside. He naturally took charge, as Kerrigans had for five generations.

Inspecting the fire sight, it wasn't difficult to see what had happened. An old stuffed chair Sean O'Connor had brought in to ease his aching back was burned to a crisp. While Sean had been picking up a months supply of oil, filters, hoses, and the like, his son, John, had dozed in the big chair, a cigarette dangling from his mouth. Clearly an accident. John would get a job at one of the other stations. Sean still had connections. But neither Fred Hogan nor Jim Barrett had been so fortunate.

Shelly had been passing the station, around 11:30 a week later; she and Lonnie having returned from Flourtown, each going their own separate way. Shelly spotted movement at the vacant station, parked a block away and approached on foot. Sitting on the floor of what had been one of the bays where cars were repaired was Fred Hogan, a beer in hand. Shelly relaxed at the sight. She'd feared vandals and didn't have a weapon as she wasn't officially a deputy.

"Watcha doing here at this time of night, Fred?" Shelly asked, visibly relieved.

"Ain't working, that's for sure," Fred said, his words slurred. Shelly saw five or six empty beer cans scattered near Hogan. Even sitting, Fred Hogan was an imposing figure. He'd been a semi-professional boxer she remembered her father telling her. Now, in his mid-forties, his massive chest strained at a T-shirt. She recalled a story how he and Jim Barrett had won a bet with the grease monkeys at one of Elkins's other stations as to who could change a tire faster. The other pair used a hydraulic jack; Fred merely lifted his side of the car while Barrett changed the tire. He'd been a fixture at O'Connor's, just as his father had worked for O'Connor's

old man before him.

"No luck at the other stations?" Shelly asked, though she knew the answer.

"Hell no. Everyone's real sympathetic and such, but sympathy don't pay the bills."

"Wish there was something I could do to help," Shelly said, feeling uncomfortable at the turn the conversation had taken.

"Hollow words, child," Hogan said, laughing bitterly. "If I asked you to speak to your daddy . . . which I ain't, mind you, would you do that for me?"

Shelly was silent.

"See what I mean?," he said. "Everyone got good intentions, all say the right things, but words don't pay the bills. Spare the *Wish I Could Help*, because talk is all it is."

"What you going to do?"

"Just sit her for awhile. No harm in that. There's nothing for me to take, even if I was of a mind to."

"I mean, what are you going to do for a job?"

"You got me there, girl." He was silent, lost in his thoughts. Then, "Just gonna sit here awhile, drink me some beers. Nothing to fear from me, Miz Manders."

Shelly left the man to his thoughts. A fire had always been some abstract notion to her. A building burned down; another took its place. She'd never thought of it in terms of the lives it impacted upon. O'Connor had his insurance to tide him over, but what would become of Fred Hogan and Jim Barrett?

She went across the street to Elkins Diner. Though Fred Hogan had been oblivious to the elements, she was chilled by the wind and needed some coffee. She was surprised to see Jack Davenport, the owner, at the counter.

"Where's Wendy?" Shelly asked. She had gone to school with Wendy Phillips, who'd been working at the diner since graduation.

"Had to cut back her hours," Davenport replied curtly. He was a burly bear of a man, coarse black hair sprouting from his body like grass grown wild. Unlike Fred Hogan, he'd let himself go to flab, a double chin and gut that obscured his belt making him look ten years older than his forty-seven years.

"She sick? Pregnant?"

"No, nothing lucky as that. Just don't have the business to keep her on."

"The food's not that bad," she said with a smile.

He returned the smile, but there was little life in it. "It's the fire at O'Connor's," he said. "I got a lot of business from Sean. Kinda took it for granted. He and his son were regulars, along with Fred Hogan and Jim Barrett. And being on the outskirts of town, customers would come here for a bite while their cars were being worked on. Business is off thirty, forty percent since the fire. I can't afford to keep Wendy a full eight hours. I feel bad, but part-time's better than no time. Just look at

Fred out there."

"See what you mean," Shelly replied. "You ain't gonna close, are you?"

"Nah, but it'll be a struggle. More hours for less money."

Shelly was about to say, *Wish there was something I could do to help*, but remembered Fred Hogan's reaction and reconsidered. It was like asking someone, *How ya doing?* You didn't expect an answer. Just seemed the proper thing to say. She drank her coffee in silence, said goodbye and went her way.

All that week she felt like shit in the mornings and fatigued by mid-afternoon. It coincided with her period failing to appear on time. She bought a self-pregnancy test kit in Flourtown and her worst fears were confirmed. Pregnant. Expecting. With child.

She broke the news to Lonnie after they'd made love in the backseat of his car, parked off a little used road halfway between Elkins and Flourtown. She'd considered telling him before his fevered gropings, but suspected he wouldn't be in the mood after and wasn't about to give up one of life's pleasures. Naked, laying across his stomach, both smoking a cigarette, she told him. She felt his body tense. There was a prolonged silence. Then he seemed to relax.

"So what you gonna do?"

"Do?" She didn't understand. "Have a baby, silly."

"Shelly, folks in Elkins don't have babies without getting married . . . and I don't intend to get married, leastways not right now *and* not with a gun pointed at my head."

"Nobody's pointing a gun at your head. Don't you love me?"

"You know I do. But your father's not gonna take too kindly to our getting married, baby or no baby."

"He'll come around. I'm sure he will."

"That's beside the point. I do love you and in time, hell, I might be the one pushing to get married, but now's not the time."

"I'm sorry, Lonnie, but this baby ain't about to go away."

"Why not?"

"What?" She was bewildered.

"What about an abortion?"

"Hush your mouth. I could never . . ."

"Don't give me that *I could never* crap. Think about it, girl. Think about what's best . . . best for us. I ain't got no job or steady income. My Pa's not in the best of health and I've got to support him. Once you have the baby you won't be fit for working. Hell, your father won't allow you to work even if you wanted to. How are we gonna make ends meet? Look, honey," he said, his fingers brushing her nipples in a way that never ceased to arouse her. She thought of pushing him away, but it felt so good, she couldn't. "I don't like the idea of an abortion any more than you do. But I don't see any way around it."

"Doc Fletcher would never . . ."

"Not here in Elkins, girl. Shit, you really *aren't* thinking straight. Have it here and you might as well take an ad out in the paper. Not even Flourtown. But, I heard some talk that in Maple Grove there's a doctor who, you know . . ."

"What if I said no? What if I said I wanted this baby? Would you marry me?"

He stopped brushing his fingers across her breast. "Shelly, I won't be bullied into marrying you. When the time's right we'll both know. But don't force me into a corner."

"And if I refuse to have an abortion?"

"You made damn sure nobody knows we're going together, seeing as I'm such an outcast and all."

"You'll deny it's yours?" she asked incredulously.

He sat up and his pale gray eyes pierced through her. "It's simple. Get an abortion or we're history."

She was about to argue further, but saw he was adamant. She reluctantly agreed. For his part, Lonnie insisted on paying half the cost of the abortion. With the matter settled, they made love again.

••

Shelly didn't have the abortion. Never had the slightest intention to terminate the pregnancy. She wouldn't show for two months, maybe three if she dressed properly and by then things would sort themselves out.

A week later, Lauder's Market went up in flames; just after midnight so, fortunately, no one was injured. This time, though, Tom Kerrigan found evidence of arson.

"How do you know?" asked Ev Manders.

"We have an erratic pattern here, Sheriff," Kerrigan explained patiently. "A flammable substance was placed in three different locations. No way this was accidental."

Word spread quickly.

"An arsonist in Elkins? Rubbish," said Rhea Stone, who worked in the pharmacy across the street.

Shelly had bought some Tylenol, the morning sickness still ravaging her body, and continued to browse through the drugstore when the conversation turned to the fire.

"Who'd do such a thing?" asked Clive Justice, waiting for his hemorrhoids medication prescription to be filled.

"That's two fires in less than a month," chimed in Winston Stone, Rhea's father and the store's owner.

"The other was an accident," said Clive. "Young Kerrigan said so, didn't he?"

"A bit wet behind the ears, if you ask me," was Winston's response. "How can he be sure that the other wasn't arson, too."

"I still can't believe it," Rhea protested again. "It's not like there's a bunch of strangers lurking about town. If it *was* arson, it has to be someone we all know. One of us!" She shuddered at the thought.

Five days later, Shelly dropped by again, around four, just as Winston was closing up.

"Closing early today, Mr. Stone? Something special planned at home?"

"No, Shelly, closing early cause no sense staying open with business so slow."

"I don't understand."

"I never knew how much business Lauder's generated. Folks would drop off prescriptions, then go shopping. With Lauder's closed, folks are driving out to Flourtown for their weekly groceries. Seems they're getting their prescriptions filled there, too."

"But isn't Mr. Lauder planning to rebuild?"

"Sure, but it'll take time. In the meantime my business has been halved. Same with Jake Atkins's dry cleaning business. He's open just four days a week. Had to lay off a presser. We all have to cut costs to the bone. Best tell your Pa to find the bastard who's starting these fires. Lots of anger in town, what with layoffs and money drying up."

Six days later the Victory Theater burned down. Unlike Ed Lauder, Curt Jenkins had no plans to rebuild. Though a lifelong resident of Elkins, he decided to move as soon as the insurance money arrived. Three employees lost their jobs.

Tom Kerrigan's finding of arson was a foregone conclusion.

"Is it the same person?" Manders asked.

"Looks like it," said Kerrigan. "Same flammable material, same pattern."

"Still think O'Connor's was an accident?"

"Think so, but then again, I might've been a bit hasty. Fact is, though, we know for certain at least two were arson . . . and I'd wager set by the same person. Any suspects?"

"Not a one," Manders answered, resignation in his voice.

With folks going to the drive-in, a bit more than halfway between Elkins and Flourtown, businesses around the Victory began to suffer.

Shelly stopped by Earl Wheeler's Ice Cream Crib and found the usually affable Earl in a foul, closemouthed mood. He was a short, dark-complexioned man in his mid-fifties, with thinning brown hair. Shelly remembered the many times he'd given her a double scoop of chocolate marshmallow ice cream even though she'd only asked for one. Seems he did the same for any of the neighborhood kids who were polite, did well in school, or whose parents might be down of their luck. Today it was Shelly who broached the subject of his discontent.

"How's business been since the fire, Mr. Wheeler?"

"What business? I made a tidy profit with the Victory the only theater in town. Did well even though I'd give doubles for the price of one to some of my favorites." There was a hint of a smile beneath his troubled face. Fleeting. There for a moment, then gone. "Kids would come in beforehand and return after each show. Guys brought their dates. Cheaper than going for a bite to eat. Now . . ." he shrugged. "Sometimes hours go by without a customer. I'm not smack in the center of town so I don't get the casual stroller. You have to go out of your way and not many are that hungry for ice cream."

"What will you do?"

"Might have to sell. There's an abandoned building near the drive-in. I can take out a loan, do some renovating and maybe open up there. Take at least six months, though, and mean some lean times. I let Jasper Peabody go today. Worked part-time while in high school, full-time the past two years. No longer enough work for one, much less two right now."

Shelly heard rumblings and grumblings wherever she went in town. Cavanaugh's Bar was one of the few establishments to profit from the fires. She went in for a beer after work one day and it was like a reunion -- Fred Hogan, Jim Barrett and Jasper Peabody drowning their troubles with beer and talk. She remained on the periphery and listened.

"Thinking of moving on," Jim Barrett said. "Lived here my whole life, but there's just no work to be found. Hear there's an Exxon station opening in Maple Grove. Me and Fred, we're going over tomorrow to see about a job."

"What bugs me," said Jasper, "is Ev Manders seems to be sitting on his ass doing nothing."

"What do you expect him to do?" asked Fred Hogan. "He's spoken to all of us, and to people who lived in the areas of the fires. Hell, hear tell he even checked into the insurance of those whose buildings caught fire."

"I can't help but think he would've caught the bastard if he had his mind on his job." Peabody wasn't about to let the matter drop.

"What's that supposed to mean?" asked Barrett, who'd gone to school with Ev Manders.

"Shit, it's common knowledge he ain't been the same since Danny died. I just wonder if he's got his heart in his job. Know what I mean?"

"Don't want to hear you talkin' trash about Ev Manders," Barrett said, poking his finger at Jasper's chest. "Known him all my life and no matter how much he be grievin' about Danny, he's doing his best."

"Quit poking me, Jim," Peabody said and slapped Barrett's hand away.

"Don't be telling me what to do." He was in Jasper's face now, his stale breath pouring over the younger, shorter man.

Sam Cavanaugh intervened before it went any further. Shelly never ceased to marvel how the man sensed just when the tension had reached its peak. He'd be serving someone on the other side of the room, yet materialize with a baseball bat out of nowhere before an argument threatened to break out into a brawl.

"You two stop jawin' at one 'nother right now or you'll be doing your drinking somewhere else."

It wasn't a threat to be taken lightly, as Cavanaugh's was the only place to go if you wanted to whet your whistle. And if you got warned off, Sam would never take you back, even if you came grovelling and bearing gifts.

Jasper Peabody glared at Cavanaugh, then at Barrett, and back to Cavanaugh again. "Shit. Ain't worth the trouble." He took his beer, went to the other side of the bar and engaged some others in conversation.

Fred Hogan brought Barrett a fresh beer, patted him on the back and soon it seemed the incident was forgotten.

Shelly sensed it was only a matter of time before baseless accusations started flying and fights would be the norm rather than the exception.

The fire at Sam Crum's paper mill therefore was incendiary in more ways than one. While only a dozen or so had felt the impact of the other fires, the paper mill was the lifeblood of the community and, one way or another, everyone was affected.

Crum had beefed up security after the fire at the Victory, but after two-and-a-half weeks without any new fire the evening patrols became lax. Crum, who'd visit every night between midnight and 1:00 a.m., firing on sight any guard not totally vigilant, skipped a night with a case of the flu and another shortly after when his in-laws dropped over unexpectedly. With their guard down, the arsonist somehow got in, started the fire, and slipped out in the confusion unnoticed.

Crum was in Ev Manders's office the next day and minced no words.

"Do you want to see this town go under, Ev?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Wake up, man. I know you've been preoccupied and I'm sorry as hell to lay the blame at your feet, but without the mill I don't know how long we can hold this place together."

"You're not planning on moving out, are you?"

"Course not, but we're talking six months, maybe a year to rebuild what with the insurance investigators and all. Do you think my employees can live off their savings that long? And, the ripple effect could be ruinous."

"Ripple effect?" Crum was one of the few in Elkins who'd gone to college, which was why the mill had grown and prospered since he'd taken over after his father's death. But he tended to talk in riddles as far as Ev was concerned.

"Twenty men without jobs means twenty families who'll be pinching pennies, which means other businesses will suffer and they'll become frugal. Stores will close, families will leave to find work elsewhere. Like dominoes falling, man."

"Sam, I've been doing everything in my power."

"Maybe that's not enough. Maybe we need someone with experience with arson."

Manders bristled at the suggestion. "Be my guest. Hire a stranger who doesn't know squat about this town. Have him waste two or three weeks duplicating everything I've already done. By that time you'll have another fire or two . . . more of your damn ripples."

"Ev, I'm at my wits end. Maybe you're right, but you've got to find this bastard . . . and soon, or we'll have to consider other options." With that he stormed out.

Shelly had heard it all. Her father's office hardly offered much privacy and both Crum and her father had been yelling at one another. The time was right, she decided, to tell her father her suspicions. She knocked and entered without waiting for a response. Her father looked terrible; his face blotchy and puffy, sweat dotted his forehead.

"Papa, I've been asking around and I think I've found someone with a motive to start the fires."

Manders smiled wanly, but didn't respond.

"Humor me, please, Papa. If I'm wrong you'll have wasted half-an-hour. But can you not afford to hear me out?"

He looked at her, *really* looked at her as a person for the first time in weeks -- months, hell, maybe years, she thought.

"Okay, Shelly. Everyone else has given me their theory. Why not you?"

She told him. He listened, becoming increasingly interested as she progressed. When she was done he left without a word to verify her story. Brought in Lonnie Burkett three days later and waited for the trial that he hoped would vindicate him.

It didn't hurt that in the six weeks leading up to the trial there were no more fires. Certainly didn't help Lonnie Burkett in the eyes of the rest of the town.

The trial was held in Maple Grove, with a local lawyer defending the youth. The evidence was damning. Ed Lauder on the stand:

"Yes, sir, Lonnie worked for me for a short time. Stocked the shelves, swept the floor . . . everything but work the register. I came up short a couple cartons of cigarettes. He denied everything, of course, but I fired him and told him to steer clear."

Lonnie had also worked at the Victory. Curt Jenkins told of an argument he'd had with Burkett:

"I usually paid by check, but as Lonnie was taking the place of a sick employee, well, I gave him cash. He accused me of shorting him. Cursed me out and, truth be, I wasn't too civil to him. He left in a huff."

Samuel Crum's testimony was equally devastating.

"I added extra security after the Victory Theater burned down. I hired Lonnie. He worked steady for a few nights, asked for a day off, worked two more then wanted another off. Fed me a line about his father needing him. I came by a bit early one night -- two days before the fire -- and caught him taking an unscheduled break with one of those Walkman radios stuck to his head. Fired him on the spot."

Ev Manders told how he'd questioned the victims and pieced together the story. He'd wanted Shelly to take the stand; get the credit she deserved, but she'd convinced him otherwise. He'd make a far more impressive witness, she told him.

"Did Mr. Burkett have an alibi, Sheriff?" the prosecuting attorney asked.

"Only that he was with his father."

"Did his father confirm his whereabouts at the time of the fires?"

"His father went to bed at nine without fail. Slept like a log, were his words. Lonnie was there when he went to bed, but he admitted his son could have left and returned without his knowledge."

"Did you find anything to physically connect him with the crimes?"

"I'd searched his home and car once before and found nothing. Being new in town, he'd been a suspect from the start. After I'd spoke with Samuel Crum and the others, I got a warrant and searched again. Under the driver's seat of his car was some broken glass and a damp rag . . . smelled of gasoline."

"Did you confront him with the evidence?"

"Yes, sir. He said he had no idea how it had gotten there."

..

The night before Lonnie was to take the stand, Shelly brought him his dinner and was about to leave.

"I need your help, Shelly," he said.

"I can't help you, Lonnie." She now regretted her outburst the first night he'd been arrested. No gain in antagonizing him, she thought. But she'd kept her distance just the same.

"We were together the night of each of those fires. Couldn't you testify to that?"

"We always got back before eleven. I don't know what you did after we separated."

"You know I couldn't do what they're saying."

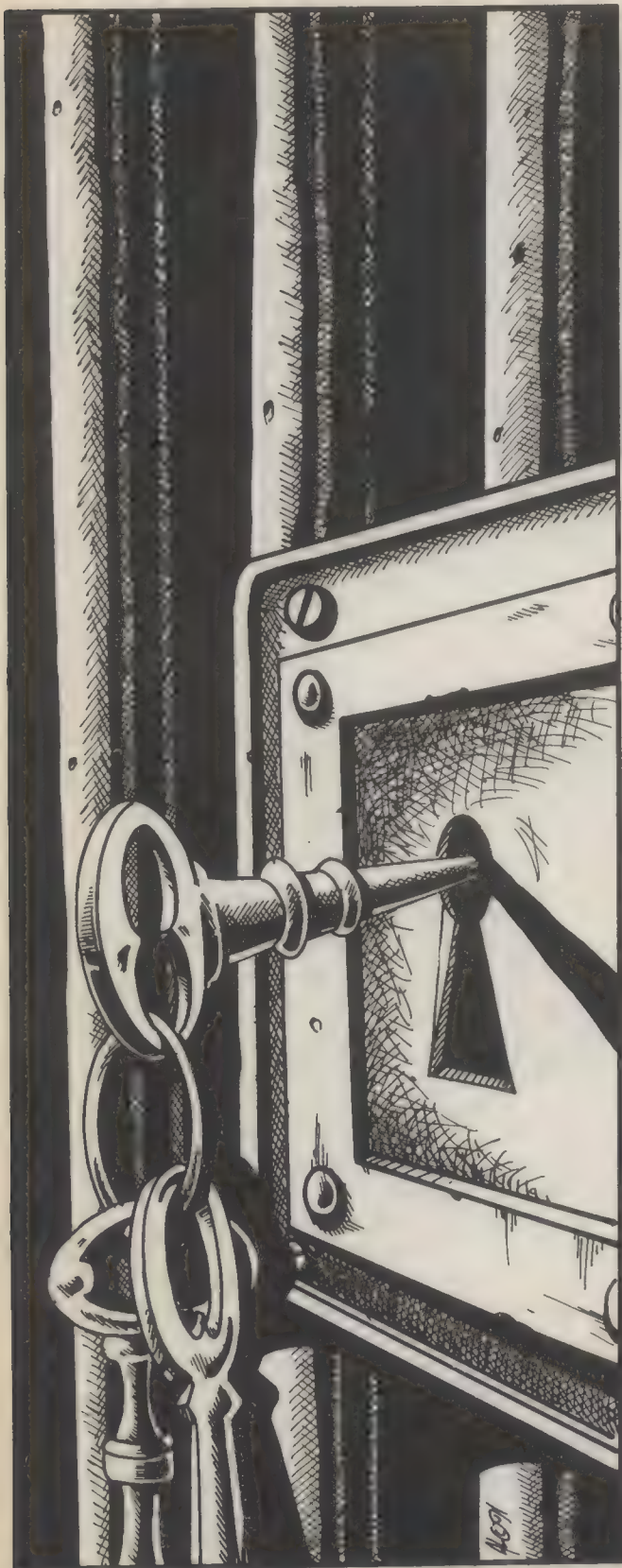
"Do I?"

"You can't think I'm guilty."

"I don't know what to think. I wonder if I ever really knew you. I was infatuated, thought I was in love. Now . . . I'm confused."

"I could tell them we were together, that you were with me when the fires started."

"No, you won't. It will mean you lied and your



father lied to protect you. Anyways, I went straight home whenever I left you. My father, *the sheriff*, will testify to that. Don't make things worse on yourself. I'm really sorry, Lonnie. I wish there was something I could do to help."

••

Lonnie stuck with his original story and was found guilty two days later. The judge wanted to toss him in prison and throw away the key.

"With your callous disregard for a community that welcomed you, you have ruined many a life. Elkins may never recover. Fortunately for you, we live in a civilized society and I am bound by the laws of this state. I thereby sentence you to the maximum of eight years in prison."

••

Shelly was sympathetic when she brought him his dinner that night. In two days he'd be transferred to a State facility.

"Eight years in prison for something I didn't do," he said, wiping his eyes.

"More like four years, if you behave yourself," she told him.

"Four years, eight years, it don't matter. I'm innocent!"

"I'm sorry, Lonnie, but . . ."

"No, Shelly, you're not sorry. Not one damn bit. Your father told me something today that got me to thinking. You know what?" He looked at her as if seeing her for the first time.

"Okay, I'll bite, what did he say?"

"He bragged how *you* cracked the case. His daughter, the next sheriff of Elkins. Told me all about it. Only one problem. If I didn't start the fires, your crack detective work means it had to be you."

"Come off it, Lonnie."

"Look, lover, you were the only one who knew all my secrets. Odd how all the fires, except O'Connor's, were set right after I'd had a run-in with the owner. And who knew? You're clever, I'll give you that. You framed me good."

"You think anyone will believe you?"

"Maybe not. But, it will cast a cloud over you. Enough of a cloud so you can kiss being sheriff goodbye."

"What do you want from me, Lonnie?" she asked, resigned.

"I *don't* want to go to prison. You'll help me escape . . . tomorrow. I figure it's the least you can do."

"And if you're caught?"

"All I want is a chance to get away. If I'm

caught, at least I tried. Diming on you won't help. You'll have to trust me, won't you lover?"

**

The next night a figure slipped past Al Lukins, dozing in the front office, and approached Lonnie's cell.

Lonnie blanched at the sight.

"Specting someone else, Lonnie?" Ev Manders said, a smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

"No . . . no, sir. Just, uh, surprised to see you here so late."

Manders unlocked the door to the cell.

"Don't be screwing with me, son. Shelly told me everything. *Everything*." He stretched out the last word for emphasis.

"She told you *she* set the fires?" Lonnie asked, his face clouded with bewilderment and a hint of terror.

"Everything. The baby. Your demand she get an abortion. Her starting the fires." There wasn't the slightest trace of emotion in the brief recital.

"What's going to happen to her?" Lonnie asked, clearly relieved.

"Happen to her? Don't quite catch your drift, son."

"You'll have to let me go, now that she's confessed . . ."

"She told me everything," Manders interrupted. "That doesn't change matters none, though."

"But . . ."

"Listen now, boy, and listen good. You don't belong here . . . in Elkins, that is, and never did. Shelly did what she had to do . . . leastways what she thought she had to do. And, damn it, boy, I'm proud of her. Both you and I painted her in a corner and she found a way out. What's going to happen to her, you ask? She's going to be the new sheriff of Elkins, that's what . . . with my blessing."

"What about me?" Lonnie gripped the bars of the cell.

"I aim to keep Shelly's promise. Took some convincing on her part, but we don't want your fool allegations causing a fuss, now do we?"

"You'll let me go?"

"Out the back door," he pointed. "And I go home. Chances are Al Lukins'll sleep for another few hours and probably won't check on you when he does wake up. You should be well on your way before anyone's the wiser. And pissed as I'll act, with me chasing after you, don't think you have much to worry about. Now, come on, time's a wasting."

At the door, he stopped him for a second. "Shelly wanted me to tell you something, Lonnie."

"That she still loves me?" Lonnie asked.

"Hardly. That she didn't get that abortion. She wouldn't have been able to hide it much longer, anyway. I'd been on her for eating like a pig and gaining weight.

She just thought you should know. You'd best be going now."

Lonnie stepped into the darkness of the alley, heard the door close, and was grabbed roughly from behind.

"Going someplace, boy?"

He stared into the eyes of Samuel Crum. Next to him were Fred Hogan, Jim Barrett, Jasper Peabody, and half-a-dozen others. Standing to the rear of the group was Shelly, a smug look of triumph on her face. Crum slapped a piece of tape across his mouth.

"Eight years ain't near enough for what you've done to us. Even the judge said so."

"Not even eight," Barrett hissed. "Shelly told us you'd get out in four. Don't see no justice in that. No sir, no justice at all."

Lonnie strained to speak.

"Shelly was real upset you got off with a slap on the wrist," said Fred Hogan. "She's one of us. Told us she'd arrange for you to escape so we could dispense a proper sentence. Smart girl, that Shelly."

Hogan hit Lonnie in the mid-section and he went down. Kicked him in the nuts and then made room for another. Each, in turn, administered justice. When Crum, the last to go, was finished, Lonnie Burkett was an unrecognizable bloody pulp.

They left him for the dogs and other scavengers.

**

A robust looking Ev Manders knocked on the door of the Sheriff's private office. With him was three-year-old Everett, Jr., who looked very much like his mother except for pale gray eyes that probed the answers to his endless string of questions.

"How's the sheriff doing today?" Ev greeted his daughter when she opened the door.

"A hard day, Papa," she said with a smile. "Ethel Tanner's been in again complaining Leila Wyche has no control over her dog. Seems he's gotten her little Bitsy pregnant . . . for the third time. Wants me to do something about it. And what have you two been up to?"

"We been fishing with Doc Fletcher. Gonna go up to the Victory this afternoon for the reopening. One of them *Ninja Turtle* movies little Ev's been talking about all week. Why not take off and join us?"

Shelly looked offended. "Don't recall you *ever* taking the afternoon off. I've got big shoes to fill. There are still some waiting for me to foul up."

"They'll be old and gray before that happens," Ev laughed. "I worry about you, though. Don't want you missing the best years of your life going after dogs in heat."

"It's a tough job, Papa, but someone's gotta do it."

-- CD



BOB MORRISH INTERVIEWS UNDERWOOD & MILLER

SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLISHING

This issue's look at the folks behind the scenes in the small press focuses on a publishing operation that is split between California and Pennsylvania: Tim Underwood resides in Novato, CA, while his partner Chuck Miller lives in Lancaster, PA. Despite the problems one might imagine would arise in trying to conduct such a business long-distance, Underwood-Miller has thrived in its fifteen years of existence, publishing well over one hundred books during that period. Recent Underwood-Miller titles include *Clive Barker's Shadows In Eden*, a collection of pieces by and about Barker, and *Berni Wrightson: A Look Back*, a lavishly-illustrated retrospective on the artist's early years.

CD: As I understand it, you two first met at a convention, and discovered a mutual interest in publishing. Could you tell us about that, including the when and the where, and give us a timeline description of how Underwood-Miller came into existence?

MILLER: Well that's not actually true; I know Chalker and Owing's book said that (eds. note: *The Science Fantasy Publishers*; a recent reference work), but we did not actually meet, physically, until our first book, *The Dying Earth*, was finished and published. The book was fin-

ished in the San Francisco area, and Tim brought all of the copies to Kansas City, to the MidAmeriCon, in 1976, and I picked it up from there. We had tables there (in the dealers' room) and we put the book out for sale. Then I brought whatever was left of the edition back to Pennsylvania to fill the initial mail orders.

Tim and I worked together through the mail for quite a while before we ever met in person. We were both part-time mail-order booksellers, and we met by selling some books to each other through the mail.

CD: How do you two divide the duties of running the company? In other words, how does the typical Underwood-Miller book project (if such a thing as a *typical book project* exists) come to pass -- that is, the editorial decisions, working with the printer and the binder, handling the warehousing and shipping, etc.?

UNDERWOOD: There are no real sharp divisions. We're constantly talking about what we're doing and what we're going to do. Once we decide to do a project, then we divide things. I *usually* do the pre-production stuff, although Chuck sometimes does that stuff, too. Chuck handles the money end of things a lot more, and over the years he's covered a lot more of the business end of things.

MILLER: You can't look at any one book and say *this is how it's done*, because there's always stuff coming in that has to be dealt with. Any day's collection of mail can contain at least fifteen different things that can send you in fifteen different directions, and they're all things that have to be taken care of.

CD: I assume this is now a full-time job for both of you? When did it become full-time?

MILLER: It's been a full-time job for us from the very beginning. This is what we do.

UNDERWOOD: Which basically means that you starve for five or ten years. You live on nothing at the beginning. I remember when we were first getting into this, I think it was back in '76, it was the first time I met Don Grant, and Don kind of took me aside and said *You know, the one thing you've got to do is to make sure you've got some way to make a living while you're doing these kind of books*. And he's right. I mean, now we've doing this for fifteen years and we know enough about what we're doing to make a living from it. Because we have no overhead, we have no one working for us, we work out of our homes -- we basically live real close to the bone.

And, really, I think that's how we've survived over the years -- we haven't had any of the big expenses that most publishers have. But we've had some good times working together.

CD: So it's just the two of you, then? I was under the impression you had some other people working with you.

MILLER: Well, we do have a lot of people on a free-lance basis that we use for different functions -- proofing, or putting stuff together, or what have you. Only during the last couple of months have I had somebody as a full-time assistant. And that's been a big help to me, because things were really getting overwhelming. I had been putting in anywhere from 60 to 80 hours a week, on a consistent basis, month-in, month-out, just trying to keep up with things. But we found somebody who's perfect for the job, who's doing real well and has a real future in the company. His name's Greg Bennett, and he's been working with us since he graduated from college last summer. So now I can put in a normal 50 hour week and be happy.

UNDERWOOD: And those hours are no exaggeration. It's absolutely true that when you work for yourself, you wind up putting in more hours than you would if you worked for somebody else. I think that, if you're going to be serious about small press publishing, you have to be in a position where you couldn't even conceive of doing anything else for a living. I mean, it's fine if you're going to do it as a hobby, but if you're going to try and make a living from it, it's real tough.

CD: Right from the beginning, the two of you have been geographically distant from one another -- have there been many problems that have arisen due to that distance?

MILLER: Just the natural problems: phone bills; having two offices and the equipment that that entails -- fax machines, computers, copiers -- ex-

penses that are double what they would be if you simply had one office. But outside of that, I'd say no, there haven't been a lot of problems that have to do with our locations.

CD: Your first book was a Jack Vance title, and you've since gone on to do -- by my count -- more than 50 Vance titles out of a total of more than 100 books published (including chapbooks). Did you originally intend the press to simply be a specialty press for Vance books, or did you have



greater aspirations?

MILLER: We never intended to be a specialty press for Vance. That never occurred to us. Jack is a wonderful fellow and a good writer, but we had no grand plan in mind. There was no master plan, in any way, shape, or form. It all just kind of happened over the years. Actually, when we were doing it, we never realized the extent to which Vance titles were dominating our list.

UNDERWOOD: I guess we've done a lot of Vance mostly because we established a good working relationship with him. And his stuff is good; questions and doubts about quality never come up with Vance's work.

CD: Depending on how you look at it, your first foray into the horror field was either the Robert E. How-

ard poetry collection *Always Comes Evening* (U-M's second book, in 1977) or your limited edition of Peter Straub's *Floating Dragon* (1982). Generally, speaking, what prompted you to get into horror?

UNDERWOOD: At that time (the time of *Always Comes Evening*), all of our books had interior illustrations. That was one of the reasons that we did *Always Comes Evening* -- it was a book that really lent itself to illustrations . . . and was also very collectible.

MILLER: For myself, I've never really had a dichotomy in my mind between horror, fantasy, and science fiction. I've read a lot of people in both fields all my life, and I've never felt the need to separate the genres the way some people do.

CD: Why did you decide to reprint the Howard title (which was originally an Arkham House title printed in 1957)?

UNDERWOOD: We both liked Howard . . .

MILLER: And the Arkham was such a small edition, something like 500 copies, that it seemed like something that needed to be done.

CD: It's reputed that you overestimated the appeal of the Howard book and printed too many copies (almost 2,500), which in turn caused you some early financial troubles. Would you agree with that assessment? When did the book finally go out of print?

MILLER: Oh, that's absolutely true.

UNDERWOOD: Yeah, that's true . . . I should give the history of that book. We sold a few hundred copies of it, but after those few hundred, the book stopped selling and other things happened . . .

MILLER: The initial problem was that we got caught up, as many pub-

lishers do, in numbers on a piece of paper -- meaning that if we print more copies, our unit cost will go down. So we just printed too many copies, and after those first few hundred went out the door, the rest of the books sat in my basement (where we stored our books). And I learned a lesson there, because the books were stored right up against the wall of the basement and they absorbed moisture from the wall -- so that they basically just turned into moldy green dust. Hundreds and hundreds of copies had to be thrown away, because they were ruined.

The final blow was . . . this was the one time we ever tried to remainder anything. We sent the remaining few hundred copies that were still in good shape to a "remainder house," which agreed to buy them. But then we were never paid for them. They just ripped us off blind. Despite any threats we could make, or any action we could take, it just wasn't worth the few hundred dollars we were owed. So the book was essentially a disaster from start to finish.

UNDERWOOD: And that's why it hasn't been in our catalog for ten years -- not because the book sold so well, but because most of the copies were lost, first through a *natural disaster* and then through a legal lesson. It seems funny now but it wasn't at the time!

CD: Getting back to *Floating Dragon*, how did you initially get involved with Peter Straub, prior to doing that book?

MILLER: Well, we met Peter at the World Fantasy Convention that we co-chaired back in 1980. Peter was a real good guy, he was willing to work with us on this book, Tim and I both admired *Ghost Story* (his previous book) a lot, and we thought *Floating Dragon* was a good book to publish in a collectors' edition.

CD: You later went on to publish Straub's *Blue Rose* novella and his

Leeson Park And Belsize Square poetry collection, but some of his other books went to other small press publishers (*The General's Wife* and *Mrs. God* to Donald Grant; *Ghost Story* to Hill House). Did you have an opportunity to publish those other books? Were both you and Straub satisfied with the results of the three Straub books that Underwood-Miller did publish? In short, how did the aforementioned titles wind up with other small press publishers?



UNDERWOOD: Well, we didn't really lose out on them. When Hill House decided to publish their *Ghost Story* edition, I remember thinking, *yeah, that's a good idea, that's a great book.*

MILLER: And in the case of the Don Grant books, it was just a case of Don, and Bob Wiener, having the good idea to take this novella (*The General's Wife*) which appeared in *Twilight Zone* magazine, and make a book out of it. So it's not like there was some bidding war going on, or anything like that.

UNDERWOOD: We're so busy as it is that we just can't do every book that we'd like to do. It's very rare that we'll see a book and say *oh, we lost out on that, we should have done that*

book. That's happened once or twice, very early on. As for our Straub books, we liked all three, especially *Blue Rose*, and I think Peter did, too.

CD: Speaking of multiple books on a single author -- you've published five non-fiction books dealing with "the Stephen King phenomenon" (*Fear Itself*; *Kingdom Of Fear*; *Bare Bones*; *Reign Of Fear*; *Feast Of Fear*). That seems like a lot -- you're almost challenging the Starmont House record for sheer King coverage -- and one could surmise that these books get cranked out strictly for the King collectors market. What's your response to that?

MILLER: Well, that is what we do -- we publish books for the collectors market. And yes, Stephen King is a major influence in the past decade on that collectors market. Collectors are interested in his books, and our King titles are a response to that.

UNDERWOOD: And you have to realize, we started the first King book, *Fear Itself*, in 1979, and at that time, King had received virtually no critical attention. He just wasn't taken seriously as a writer yet. So *Fear Itself* was a new kind of book, that Chuck and I put together. And we liked doing it, so we did some more. They were books that we knew would sell reasonably well, but we didn't make a lot of money on any of them.

CD: While we're talking about non-fiction titles, you recently published Stanley Wiater's collection of interviews, *Dark Dreamers*, as well as the non-fiction title *Clive Barker's Shadows In Eden*, and you have another book scheduled that covers Dean Koontz's career. Did you make a conscious decision to publish more non-fiction or is it something that's just sort of happened?

MILLER: It wasn't a conscious decision. It was just a case of what was available to us . . .

UNDERWOOD: The *Dark Dreamers* book was brought to us, wasn't it?

MILLER: Yeah, certainly. Stanley (Wiater) had it all put together and he brought it to us. *Shadows In Eden* came to us via a note from Steve Jones in 1987 (the editor of the book), who saw what we were doing with the King books and said *do you want to do something like this with Barker?* And we thought it was a good idea, so we took it and ran with it.

CD: In 1989, you began reprinting DAW's *Year's Best Horror* series, in three-years-at-a-shot omnibus editions, under the series title *HorrorStory*. I think this is an excellent and worthwhile undertaking, but what led you to do it? It's not the most obvious project in the world to undertake.

MILLER: For years, I had wondered *why doesn't someone do these in hardcover? These are great collections.* I mean, Karl Wagner is a great editor.

UNDERWOOD: The older ones were impossible to find. They're just not out there. And, also, they had these beautiful covers (until recently, all covers in the series were by Michael Whelan).

MILLER: It just got down to the fact that if we wanted to see them in hardcover, we were going to have to publish them ourselves.

UNDERWOOD: They've been interesting because we've gotten to include a lot of authors who had never been in hardcover before.

CD: Why did you start the series with Volume V, and work backwards, rather than starting with Volume I?

MILLER: There were incredible problems locating some of the authors (ed. note: there are over 50 authors in each volume) to get their signatures. Volume V was the most recent full volume that we could put

together, and we decided to do that first primarily because the more recent authors were easier to find. The farther you go back, the more you find that people have moved, or died, or whatever.

UNDERWOOD: It's incredibly difficult to do these multiple-author signings. There are just so many factors involved. For instance, you've got boxes of signature sheets being mailed around the country for everyone to sign. At one point, one of our boxes just disappeared. One of the authors had moved, and the box just vanished. So for months we were trying to find out what had happened to the box. I finally travelled to the address it had last been sent to. This woman answers the door in her bathrobe, didn't know what I was talking about, and wasn't interested in talking to me. I kinda stuck my foot in the door and kept talking to her . . . and then she vaguely remembered a package coming. And she racked her

and IV) didn't sell as well as hoped, and that you may not complete the series. Any truth to that?

UNDERWOOD: Well, we're going ahead with the series.

MILLER: We've done almost as well as we had estimated. We've still got some, but they're still selling, slowly but steadily.

CD: In a similar vein, what led you to reprint the three Dennis Etchison-edited *Masters Of Darkness* paperbacks in an omnibus *Complete Masters Of Darkness* edition?

UNDERWOOD: Dennis is an old friend of ours, and it is a top-notch collection of authors. That book has sold really well -- which I guess isn't surprising when you consider who is in it. I mean, that is a collection of authors you'll never see again.



brain a little more, and then she went and dug it out from where it was sitting in the bottom of her closet. It was unopened, and inside were sheets that had been signed by Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, Harlan Ellison, and a dozen other authors.

CD: It's rumored that the first two volumes in the *HorrorStory* series (V

CD: You've also undertaken two large single-author, multi-volume projects in recent years: the five-volume *Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick* and the three-volume *Selected Stories of Robert Bloch*. Were there particular problems involved in doing such massive projects?

MILLER: Well, you're multiplying

the normal publishing problems by the number of books in the set. With the Dick set, you're talking about five books all at once, so there's an enormous amount of typesetting, proofreading, and revisions . . . and you get the printing bill for five books all at one time. And that's huge.

UNDERWOOD: You don't see any New York publishers doing those kind of sets, because they're just not profitable. They're really just a labor of love.

CD: Given the title and nature of the Dick book, was it just the sheer volume of Bloch's short fiction that made you decide not to do *The Complete Stories of Robert Bloch*?

UNDERWOOD: Reprint rights to some of the Arkham stories and some others just weren't available.

CD: We've already mentioned the

forthcoming Koontz non-fiction book and the remaining volumes in the *Year's Best Horror* series -- what else do you have coming out in the future?

UNDERWOOD: First I should say that *Cold Terror: The Dean R. Koontz Companion* has been postponed, probably for a year or two. *Shadows in Eden* took three years to publish, so we're beginning to see a pattern with these kind of books.

MILLER: We're working on *The Selected Letters of Philip K. Dick*, which is six volumes. But we'll be doing those one at a time, instead of all at once, like the *Collected Stories*. And there's also an ongoing series of Dick's non-fiction work, entitled *Selections From The Exegesis*.

UNDERWOOD: And we're going to be doing more Vance. Jack just finished the third book in his current

series, and it's called *Throy*, and we're going to publish that this Spring.

MILLER: And there's a Vance short story collection that we're going to be doing, since Jack's the Guest of Honor at the 50th World Science Fiction Convention in Orlando in 1992. We wanted to have a collection of his work out for that convention. That's called *When The Five Moons Rise*.

UNDERWOOD: We're also talking to Steve Jones about some anthologies that he's going to edit. We're planning a collection of Virgil Finlay artwork. Chuck and I are both Virgil Finley fans. And -- outside of the genre -- we're publishing Volume II of Paul Williams' biography of Bob Dylan.

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CLIVE BARKER'S SHADOWS IN EDEN

Edited by Stephen Jones
Illustrations by Clive Barker

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Usually, coming out of it was simple. There'd be a moment of panic—always the panic, upon realization of who I was and where I was, together with wondering where I'd been, where I was now. Then I'd gradually reorient myself and get ready to pick up the pieces and go home. So far there had never been any pieces. So far, I'd never snapped out of it and found myself at home.

Only this time—

This time I came out of it standing in our bedroom in the apartment. Standing there in the moonlight with the scissors glinting in my hand. Standing over the body of Marie

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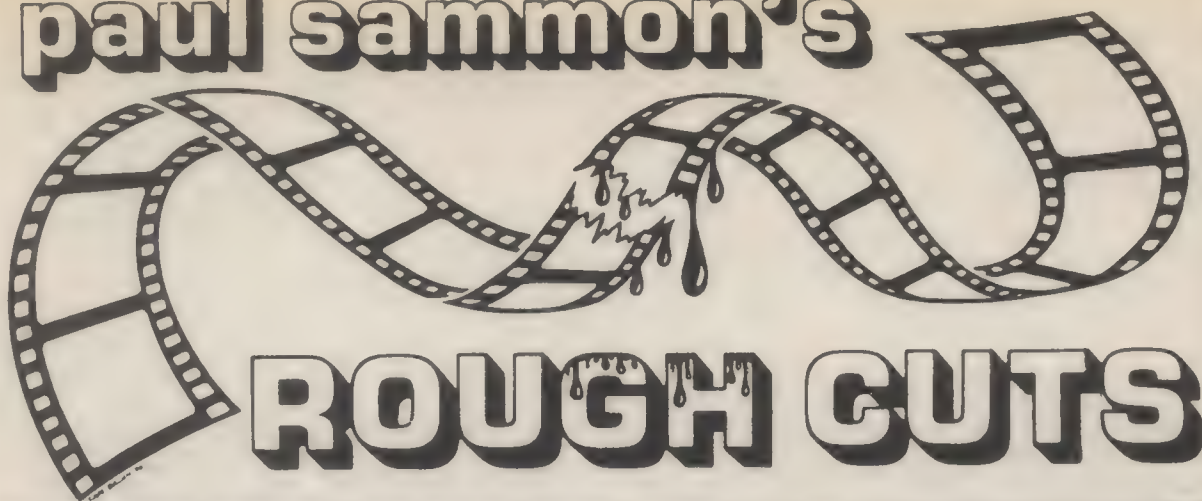
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paul sammon's



No video or laserdisc reviews this time, just an immense Holiday Bonus. But before we tear off the gaily-patterned wrapping paper surrounding our special New Year's surprise (more on that in a moment), let's take a quick look at *Rough Cuts*' favorite video and laserdisc mail-order companies. I've recently received some requests for personal recommendations along these lines, so I thought we'd start 1992 with information on which video/disc outfits you should be doing business with.

Then we'll move on to that Holiday Bonus I mentioned earlier. Don't you love surprises? And the *anticipation*?

..

RECOMMENDED VIDEO MAIL-ORDER COMPANIES

For those of us who've already tracked down the last hidden gem in the last local mom'n'pop video emporium -- or for those small-town dwellers unable to reach big city video stores -- hard-to-find videotapes are really only as far away as the nearest mailbox. At the moment there is a plethora of mail-order video companies out there wallowing around in the bottomless mudhole of generic cinema, with various businesses spe-

cializing in science fiction, horror, exploitation, public domain, or Eurotrash titles. Getting our hands on these hot little numbers is simply a matter of contacting a reputable dealer and waiting out the vagaries of the U.S. postal service.

But how do we know which companies to order from? Which can we trust? For instance, the Tennessee-based *Mondo Video* has recently taken heat for apparently ripping off both customers and filmmakers alike. And real-life horrors are the ones I think we'd rather avoid.

The answer? Contact the tried and true. The following mail-order companies have all been personally sampled by yours truly in the course of writing his "best of the genres" video book, the one titled *Blood and Rockets*. Believe me, since *B & R* was a project which involved watching literally *thousands* of videotapes, I now know which mail-order services are reliable. And which ain't.

As for finding out what's currently in stock, all of these companies offer extensive catalogs. Some require a small payment, some don't. As always, your best bet is to call a company first and then make some sort of human contact. When those ever-shrinking dollars finally leave your clutching, sweaty hands, you'll at least then know that you haven't

tossed your hard-won cash into the postal equivalent of the twilight zone.

Pens at the ready? Good. Pick up those checkbooks and go?

Eddie Brandt's Saturday Matinee (6310 Colfax Ave., North Hollywood, CA 91606. 818-506-4242, 818-506-7722)

In all of Los Angeles, *Eddie Brandt's* is just about my favorite independent video retailer. Nestled in a funky building besides a marginal area of North Hollywood, *Brandt's* is a family-run organization composed of knowledgeable film buffs. Their selection of science fiction/horror/fantasy/cult films is quite extensive; they also carry just about every *Sinister Cinema* title as well (see *Sinister Cinema* section below). If you telephone them, ask for Donovan -- he's the house genre expert. *Eddie Brandt's* also features a large catalog, thousands of film stills and the opportunity to buy or rent your selections. All at reasonable prices too.

Dickens Video by Mail (5323-A Elkhorn Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95842. 916-331-8370)

No other mail-order business listed herein can boast of as large an inventory as *Dickens Video*; these people carry just about every currently available science fiction, fantasy or horror title now out on video-

tape. Notice the words "currently available," though, since this mostly mainstream company primarily deals with new or in-stock tapes. And while there are some discontinued titles for sale, you won't find any bootleg, public domain, or dubbed copies here.

Dickens Video also doesn't rent tapes, it sells them, at the going rate. Yet I hasten to add that I haven't intended any of the preceding comments to sound like criticisms. *Dickens* is a helpful, very professional company. For instance, if *Dickens Video* doesn't carry a copy of any currently in-print title -- which is doubtful -- it will then try to track one down for you.

What really distinguishes this company is its superior service and enormous selection of genre titles. Couple these elements with the fact that all *Dickens* videotapes are brand-new-in-their- original-package cassettes, and what you've got is a major player in the video mail-order game. Just remember -- if a science fiction, horror or fantasy film has recently been released on videotape, chances are good that *Dickens Videos* has it.

Rex Miller's Rare Old-Time Videos (Route 1, Box 457-D, East Prairie, MO 63845)

Yep, this is the same Rex Miller who writes those crackling Jack Eichord/Chaingang thrillers. *Rex Miller's Old Time Videos* is his day job, and a pretty successful one at that -- Rex has been at this for over 20 years now.

The emphasis here is on B-movies, all kinds of them, from westerns to jungle adventures to crazy thrillers like *The Black Book* (a noir historical drama about the French Revolution). *Rex Miller* also deals in classic public domain TV shows, with many episodes helmed by directors better known for their theatrical films: Hitchcock, Peckinpah, Altman, etc. The overall selection of horror and science fiction titles here is relatively small, though. Then again, you can always pick something from Rex's

huge inventory of radio and comic book premiums, things like a Captain Midnight Secret Decoder Badge or a Dick Tracy Detective Kit.

Rex Miller offers two huge catalogs, one for rare videos, one for those radio premiums. He's also one of the nicest guys in the business. Should it come as any surprise, then, that Miller can also be counted on to give you the straight poop concerning the quality of the individual prints he uses for each of his various videos?

Sinister Cinema (P.O. Box 4369, Medford, OR 97501-0168. 503-773-6860)

Everyone's favorite public domain video company.

Sinister Cinema is among the oldest, largest and most important of the PD mail-order houses. Owner Greg Luce stocks a wide and internationally-varied selection of genre films, many of them genuine classics which have yet to make their "official" appearance on major video labels (we're talking titles like *The Creeping Unknown*, *Castle of Blood* or *The Man Who Changed His Mind*).

Sinister also stocks many Poverty Row mysteries and westerns, along with early British thrillers, campy serials and excellent trailer compilations. Luce is a genuine "film buff's film buff", too; included in his inventory are such rarities as the British version of Mario Bava's *Black Sunday*.

Sinister Cinema offers fast, reliable service and generally good quality videos. You just can't go wrong dealing with this particular company. Now, if I can only save up enough pin money for that copy of *Planeta Burg*...

Consumer Alert! Consumer Alert! Greg Luce has recently sounded the alarm on a possible new federal copyright law which could effectively kill off the future sale of all public domain videos. All concerned videophiles should immediately get in touch with Luce regarding this horrendous possibility (I

already have). Greg will then either send you a form letter or let you know who in Washington D.C. to contact to register your objections against this ill-begotten legislation, one which seriously jeopardizes our mutually shared filmic heritage.

Something Weird Video (P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133. 206-361-3759)

Something Weird owner Mike Vraney once told me that 1969 was the happiest year of his life. So he decided to step out of the present timeline and keep living there.

Maybe that's why *Something Weird* showcases such an eccentric mix of Sixties genre videos (even the name of Vraney's company comes from a 1960s Hershel Gordon Lewis splatter epic). Anyway, here's where you'll find numerous public domain Sixties gems like *Spider Baby*, *Attack of the Mushroom People*, and *Werewolf in a Girl's Dormitory*. Rather than leave the wrong impression, though, I should point out that *Something Weird* also stocks a wide variety of cult films from other decades.

For instance, Vraney offers the incredibly rare Spanish-language version of 1931's *Dracula*. *Something Weird* is where I picked up my (very good) copy of the recent Japanese cyberpunk film *Tetsuo*, too. You'll also find things like the late-Fifties *The Devil's Commandment*, Mexican horror films and adults-only sex-exploitation titles (*The Erotic Adventures of Pinocchio*).

Recently, *Something Weird* has plunged into the "nudie cutie" genre, offering hours of taped burlesque routines, peep-show shorts, and "Wrasslin' She-Babes Of The Fifties." Mostly, though, *Weird* offers the type of hip cult movies *Psychotronic Video* likes to write about. In sum this is a well-stocked company with a pleasant owner; *Rough Cuts* says check it out.

Video Mania (Suite 129, 2520 N. Lincoln, Chicago, IL 60614. 312-92-7205)

Like *Dickens Video*, Barry Kaufman's *Video Mania* only carries factory boxed videotapes; no bootlegs or dupes. But where *Dickens* tends towards the mainstream, *Mania* gleefully swerves off into lurid realms of moral turpitude; this is the premiere source for splatter, Euro-trash and Asian horror films.

Among Kaufman's many video treats are such treasures as *Bell from Hell* (my all-time favorite Spanish horror film), the uncut Italian language version of *Deep Red* and Ohio-author Jim VanBebber's intense and splatterly *Deadbeat at Dawn*. Then there are all those wild Chinese horror movies; *Spooky Spooky*, *Seventh Curse*, *Ghost Snatchers*, *A Chinese Ghost Story* and so on and so forth.

You won't believe the amazing variety of great films stocked inside the *Video Mania* warehouse. Order a catalog soon; half the fun of this Dario Argento/Lucio Fulci oriented company lies in reading Kaufman's trenchant, hilarious comments on his own inventory.

Don't forget to tell 'em Paul Sammon sent ya!

Video Vault (105 Wisconsin Ave., Washington, DC 20007. 202-625-0605/706 Duke Street, Old Town, Alexandria, VA 22314. 703-549-8848)

Billing itself as "Your Alternative Video Store," *Video Vault* is an East Coast "video club specializing in hard-to-find movies as well as all the new releases." As their catalog then goes on to say, "Many of our movies are in BETA as well as VHS. Our selection of classic, foreign, and cult is second to none. We carry hundreds of movies that you will not find at the local video store. We pride ourselves on having something for everyone."

Putting aside that ad copy for the moment, *Video Vault* does offer one truly worthwhile service -- like *Eddie Brandt's*, the *Vault* rents videos by mail. Here's how it works; after sending the *Vault* a suitable deposit and membership fee (call for

a quote on the current charges), you then order your video selection from *Video Vault's* well-organized catalog. Keep your video for about a week. Then simply mail it back and order another one. Simple, no?

The *Vault* also offers a free (to members) video finders service, lots of movies for sale, a newsletter and a video reservation service. So the next time you have a hankering to see *Attack of the Crab Monsters* -- but suddenly realize that Blockbuster Video will never carry such a title (they should go bankrupt, the censorious fucks) -- call *Video Vault* instead!

**

LASER DISC MAIL-ORDER

Sight & Sound (27 Jones Road, Waltham, MA 02154. 617-894-8633)

I'm frequently asked for information on reliable, well-stocked mail-order companies specializing in laserdiscs. To my way of thinking there's only one such place -- Boston's *Sight & Sound* company.

Graced with exceptionally large, frequently updated inventory, *Sight & Sound* routinely offers many mouth-watering financial inducements for the serious laserhound: "15% to 20% off" sales, as well as special monthly discounts. But this professionally-run outfit's biggest asset lies in its enormous selection of imported laserdiscs.

Here's where to go for that Japanese letterboxed version of Argento's *Deep Red*, or for an uncut German version of Bava's *Blood and Black Lace*! *Sight & Sound* offers a wide variety of import items, including Japanese animation, fantasy, horror, science fiction, and Chinese titles. You should try and glom onto a copy of *Sight's* annual import catalog (which costs \$8.95), too; this thick little booklet offers page after page of hard-to-find items.

In any event, if you do eventually order something from *Sight & Sound*, try to mention that you heard

about them from *Rough Cuts*. Then maybe I can get a deep discount on that double-disc set of *The Gates of Hell*...

**

A SHORT POLITICAL DIATRIBE

Since this is being written only six days before Christmas, 1991, I thought I'd close out this (personally horrible) year (of Job) with the type of gift that keeps on giving. What I'm referring to are magazines: *Rough Cuts* #6 will now present its much-anticipated Holiday Bonus, a comprehensive checklist (complete with addresses and telephone numbers) of all the best genre film magazines.

Or most of them, anyway.

But first...

(Aaarrgh! Can you take the suspense?!?)

Thanks to Doug Winter and T.E.D. Klein for their kind comments regarding my previous column. Last issue's notes on Abel Gance's *J'Accuse* (1937: Connoisseur Video) seem to have excited a large number of readers who were previously unaware of this crazy, passionate anti-war fantasy; my comments on Chinese horror films also engendered a nice response.

Incidentally, I recently caught the theatrical release of *A Chinese Ghost Story III* at the State Theater in downtown Pasadena. While it's a tad too derivative of the first two *Chinese Ghost Story* films to qualify as a "must-see," I'm happy to report that the lunatic abandon with which Asian filmmakers approach fantasy and horror here shows no signs of abating. For instance, *A Chinese Ghost Story III* features some wild point-of-view shots of a giant demon tongue ramming down a victim's throat; these effects would make even director Sam Raimi (he of the ultrakinetic *Darkman* and *Evil Dead 2*) shake his head in astonished disbelief.

So what about this film magazine list? Well, as we all know, the

next best thing to watching movies is reading about them. And anyone even remotely serious about or in love with film should give these publications some serious thought (and money!). As always, these magazines carry the official *Rough Cuts* Seal of Approval. This means you won't be pissing away precious dollars during a severe recession. Of course, you can always take heart from the fact that the Bush Administration recently reassured us that this recession is *over* (a statement which registers as strongly on the credulity scale as Ronald Reagan's ongoing assertion that he never dyed his hair while he was President).

Speaking of the unholy Bush/Reagan combine, the best Christmas present I received in 1991 concerned the increasing nationwide dissatisfaction with ole' Smilin' George and his arrogant pack of mendacious wardheelers. America's dawning realization that "Teflon Ronnie" Reagan gutted this nation's economy, as well as the fact that he may have been involved in such treasonous enterprises as The October Surprise, has also made me giddy as a drunken man.

But there still remain some hard, unanswered questions. For instance -- where were all you flag-waving zombies when Bush was blithely ordering the deaths of over 100,000 Iraqi peasants earlier this year? Why did the media spinelessly roll over and accept the sanitized coverage of that "war". One which gouged our economy, made no change in the Iraqi dictatorship, and saw a "grateful" Kuwait buying the bulk of its rebuilding supplies not from America but from Western Europe? And how has the American casualty list suddenly jumped from one to six hundred?

Then again, why do I continue to insert political diatribes in articles ostensibly concerned with horror films?

Because *Rough Cuts* is *not* your ordinary film column, that's why. Better yet, my raging disgust with our

short-sighted, self interested "leadership" can best be summed up by Max Von Sydow in *Hannah and Her Sisters*: "If Jesus Christ came back to Earth today, he'd take one look around and throw up."

Then again, why pick on politics? Please feel free to single out your own atrocity. Toxic waste. Drive-by shootings. S & L scandals. Crack. Ten-year-old prostitutes. Slash 'n burned rain forests. Poverty. Sexism. Racism. Violence. Unemployment. Ignorance. There's a whole world of hurt out there.

Happy New Year, everybody.

**

NEW YEAR'S SURPRISE

"Prozines" are professionally produced publications. "Fanzines" are independent efforts manufactured by amateur publishers. Both magazine categories are no strangers to the worlds of science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

For instance, fanzines devoted to science fiction literature and fandom were being published as early as 1930 -- Raymond A. Palmer's *Comet* appeared that same year, and it's generally regarded as the first sf 'zine. For sixty-odd years science fiction fanzines have continued to appear in mailboxes, at conventions, and on specialty shop magazine racks. Charles Brown's *Locus* is probably the best known current example of the sf 'zine, simply because of its high profile (and *Locus* is a fanzine, despite its slick ads and regular appearance on B. Dalton bookshelves).

Of course, horror literature also spawned its fair share of fanzines. The Seventies' *Nyctalops* and the Eighties' *The Horror Show* are both good examples of solid, well-produced horror 'zines. But let's move on to horror & sf film magazines.

Genre film magazines got their official start in the late 1950s with the premiere issue of Forrest J. Ackerman's seminal *Famous Monsters of*

Filmland. The most undeniably influential of all genre film mags, *Famous Monsters* was primarily aimed at young boys between the ages of eight and fifteen. Hugely successful, *Famous Monsters* was quickly imitated by Russ Bender's short-lived but interesting *Fantastic Monsters of the Films* in the early 1960s. The Sixties also saw the start of the immortal *Castle of Frankenstein*, an excellent, authoritative semi-prozine edited by the late Calvin T. Beck. *CoF* was the first genre film mag to pull away from a kiddie audience, targeting intelligent high school/college-level film buffs instead. It further featured an ongoing capsule comment film review section written by no less a personage than now-famous director Joe Dante; if anyone cares, *Castle of Frankenstein* was also the first film magazine I was published in. This event occurred way back in 1972 in issue #19, with my premiere film article being an interview with Douglas Trumbull on *Silent Running* (his directorial debut).

The 1970s then spawned any number of interesting filmzines, including the horror-oriented *Monster Times*, the late lamented *Photon*, and the research-heavy *Fantascene*. But the Seventies were also responsible for a far more significant event. After decades of being the near-exclusive province of Heinlein-quoting nebbishes and pasty-faced *Horror of Dracula* freaks, fanzines as a whole suddenly broke wide, attracting a much more diversified -- and hip -- audience.

For example, the late 70s punk-rock explosion resulted in a plethora of fanzines devoted to industrial, hip-hop, punk, rap, rockabilly, new wave, glam, glitter, and plain old rock n' roll music (editorial aside: one of my favorite rockzines is the ever-reliable *Rock & Roll Disc*, which modestly bills itself as "America's Best CD Publication". You can order a copy from TAG Enterprises, P.O. Box 17601, Memphis, TN 38187-0601. Telephone is 901-386-4954). Rock

wasn't the only relatively new area of fanzine interest, either. Publications proliferated on virtually every aspect of pop culture, from Japanese animation (*Anima*) to, I swear, the Brady Bunch (*Teenage Swingin' Role Models*).

Simultaneously, the relentless fragmentation of popular film into countless subgenres -- coupled to the newfound affordability of cheap home computers -- meant that by the mid-1980s/early 1990s many new kinds of film zines were also lurking in the wings. In fact, all it takes to now produce an interesting film fanzine is the proper wordprocessing program, powerful desktop publishing software, and the relentless desire to go totally, hopelessly broke.

Yet while we're all familiar with such professionally-produced rags as *Starlog* and *Fangoria*, most potential film mag readers are still unaware of the many funny, sometimes scatological, but generally terrific new filmzines floating around on the fringes of polite society. To rectify this sorry state of affairs I've assembled a comprehensive (but by no means complete) listing of some of the best contemporary film fanzines, with the occasional prozine thrown in. Incidentally, many of these publications come imbued with surprisingly high standards; just about all of them exhibit the most entertaining, enthusiastic, and all-around best writing being done on genre films today.

Do their publishers and yourself a big favor.

Buy a few.

(A word of warning: fanzines are notoriously difficult to find, at least by mainstream film fans. Subscription rates to these things also vary, while the harsh economic realities of independent publishing guarantees a low survival rate. Therefore, each of the following entries includes a mailing address and, where possible, a telephone number. Your best bet is to write beforehand for subscription information. Better still,

call if you can afford it).

**

RECOMMENDED FILM MAGAZINES

Bloody Hell: The Flesh & Blood Fanzine With A Brain In Its Head (David Prothero, 11 Pen-y-Wain Place, Roath, Cardiff CF23NA England)

This English 'zine mixes reviews and articles in its ongoing examination of splatter films, hardcore porn, Italian horror, and Eurotrash pix. Dario Argento seems to be the main influence here; issue #3 features a ten-page probe of Dario's finest along with a revealing Argento interview concerning *Two Evil Eyes*. There's also an interesting article covering Jerry Stahl/Stephen Sayadian's hardcore cult science fiction opus, a little item they co-coined under the pseudonym "Rinse Dream" and then titled *Cafe Flesh*.

Brutarian (Dominik Salem/Odium Enterprises, P.O. Box 25222, Arlington, VA 22202-9998)

I've only seen the premiere issue of this nicely typeset, professionally-bound fanzine, but it's a winner. Well-written and witty, with contributions by former writers for *Deep Red* and *Pandemonium*, *Brutarian* includes such articles as "Dwain Esper: Cinema's Forgotten Scumbag," and "Film Revivals Great and Small: Searching For the Magic." There's also an outraged attack on the purportedly shabby business practices of underground mail-order darling Amok Books (titled, appropriately enough, "Fuck Amok"). *Brutarian* further includes comic strips, an article on the sensational Hong Kong film director John Woo (*The Killer*), and lots of book and film reviews. Here's a sample of the latter, taken from a critique of the vastly underrated *Exorcist III*; "a creepy little exercise in horror providing some of the chills of the original along with the more complex philosophical approach to the good-evil

dialectic seen in Boorman's sequel (aka *The Heretic*)."

Cinefantastique (Frederick S. Clarke, 7240 W. Roosevelt Rd., Forest Park, IL 60130. 708-366-5566)

Probably the best-known of the filmzines, although I'm sure that editor Fred Clarke, like *Locus*' Charlie Brown, would rather have you believe *Cinefantastique* is a prozine.

Whatever. *CfQ* boasts high production standards (glossy paper, lots of color photographs) and in-depth coverage of current genre blockbusters. It also regularly features "making of" cover stories on such classics as *The Birds*, definitive pieces that are mated to the kind of criticism that wouldn't be out of place in *Film Comment*.

Cinefantastique generates its own fair share of controversy, however. Some of the directors and studios I've worked with here in L.A. over the years consider *CfQ* to be nothing more than a high-toned muckraker. They think *Cinefantastique* distorts facts (when it isn't getting them wrong), accentuates the negative, gives away plot details of important works-in-progress and generally bites the hand that feeds it. *CfQ*'s occasional publication of unauthorized photographs has also landed it in hot water, most spectacularly with the lawsuit LucasFilms filed against this magazine in the late 1970s, in conjunction with certain stills that would up in *CfQ*'s first *Star Wars* issue.

Conversely, Fred Clarke defends these charges by stating that studios habitually overreact to his First Amendment right to cut through the promotional hype and bullshit. It also should be noted that *CfQ* has achieved the status of a genuine institution; this is an important, consistently first-rate effort. The mag as a whole also adopts a rather admirable "David vs. Goliath" stance, one which prefigured the current "fuck you" attitude taken by more recent filmzines by a good two decades.

In regards to the ongoing *Cine-*

fantastique controversy, all I can say is that, early on, *CfQ* gave a tremendous boost to my journalistic career. At one point I was a minor star for this publication, particularly after I wrote well-received cover stories on such films as *Blade Runner* and *Conan the Barbarian*. I also have collected literally every issue of this magazine, whose publishing history now spans an over twenty-year time period.

On the other hand, in 1984, after some thoughtless chicanery *CfQ* pulled on me while I was writing their *Dune* double issue, I vowed to never write for them again.

And I haven't.

That should tell you something.

Cinefex

Cinefex editor Don Shay is one of the true gentlemen of the publishing business; hard-working, professional, and honest. This just goes to prove that good guys *can* finish first, because *Cinefex* is, without a doubt, the best special effects magazine in the whole wide world.

Cinefex has been coming out for over ten years now, and though it too is essentially a fanzine, it's the most beautifully produced of the lot. Gorgeous stills, heavy paper stock, knock-out covers, and an instantly identifiable digest-sized format make *Cinefex* a fan's wet dream. Each issue features in-depth technical coverage on two or three special-effects films, from the expected *Star Trek* blockbusters to more mainstream films like *Backdraft*. And the writing is saturated with facts. Here's a magazine whose strongest asset is the staggering amount of sheer information it manages to collect between its covers.

This technoslant is also *Cinefex's* weak point, though, making its articles somewhat dry and impersonal; don't look for any *CfQ*-type scandals here. Then again, Don Shay doesn't care about controversy. He's only after pure, unadulterated fact.

While *Cinefex* certainly isn't for the average genre film fan, those interested in the art, technology, and

history of special effects need go no further than this always top-notch offering.

(Yes. I've written for *Cinefex* as well. Articles I'm proudest of were cover stories on, respectively, *E.T.*, *Gremlins*, *Robocop*, and "The Terry Gilliam Trilogy" -- *Time Bandits*, *Brazil*, and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*).

Deep Red

In my St. Martin's Press book, *Splatterpunk: Extreme Horror*, I included a non-fiction essay entitled "I Spit In Your Face: Films That Bite." Why? Because "Spit" looked at current splatterfilms -- one of the key splatterpunk influences -- in a funny, concerned, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and critical way.

The well laid-out, informational gore-film fanzine *Deep Red* also shares "Spit's" better qualities. It should -- both efforts were/are produced by that always interesting gorehound, writer/editor/graphic artist Chas. Balun.

Despite its erratic publishing schedule, *Deep Red* has managed to rise to the unquestioned top of the specialized splatterfilm heap. *Red* routinely spotlights in-depth interviews with and articles on such splatterfilm gods as Lucio Fulci (*House By The Cemetery*), Michelle Soavi (*The Church*) and Ruggero Deodato (*Cannibal Holocaust*); other *Deep Red* offerings have included a long, comprehensive career interview with world-class Italian filmmaker Dario Argento (one conducted by Balun himself). Noted genre film writer Steve Bissette is also a frequent contributor, with his enlightening piece on the sadistic Japanese horror/sex subgenre (called *pinku eiga*, or "pink films") a recent standout.

What sets apart *Deep Red* from the other juvenile enthusiasts wading through this fetid cinematic pond is the underlying seriousness (and moral questioning!) that permeates *Deep Red's* approach. Beneath Balun's gleeful enthusiasms for exploding heads and spilled entrails lies some

somber reflections on the sociological implications of such carnography, and these kinds of philosophical musings are rare in this field indeed. Another *Deep Red* standout is its ongoing "Gore Score" review column, capsule comments which concern themselves "with *nothing* but the quantity of blood, brains, guts, slime, snot, puke, or other assorted precious bodily fluids spilled, slopped, or splattered during the course of the film."

Splatter enthusiasts can't go wrong with *Deep Red*. This is a truly handsome-looking, humorous and informative labor of love.

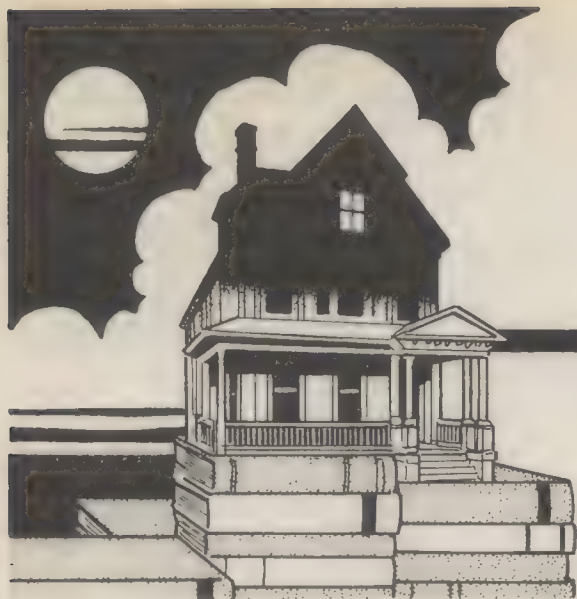
Ecco: The World of Bizarre Video (Charles Kilgore, Kill-Gore Productions, P.O. Box 65742, Washington DC 20035)

A prime example of the "less is more" concept.

Charles Kilgore's compact, nicely researched *Ecco* is one of my favorite short fanzines (issue #14, for example, only ran 12 pages). *Ecco* expertly covers exploitation, horror, sexploitation and minor Forties classics like *Strangler of the Swamp*; a recent two-part article concerned hardcore porno westerns! Kilgore is also to be commended for making *Ecco* "ever vigilant of video industry sleazeballs and their crass marketing ploys." Among *Ecco's* latest targets was Blockbuster Video's nefarious practice of rejecting videos for content or "unacceptable" cover art.

Incidentally, Blockbuster recently cleared out all their NC-17 titles, even such obvious works of art as *The Cook, The Thief, The Wife and Her Lover*. Now there are dark whispers that unrated videos will be the next category to get the Blockbuster heave-ho. Why don't we all get together and piss down this chain's collective video return slots? I'll bring the beer...

Coming next issue: the conclusion of ROUGH CUTS' definitive "Best Of The Filmzines," covering EYEBALL to VIDEO WATCHDOG!



KATHRYN
PTACEK

ANTHOLOGY ATTIC

This, in case you haven't gathered that by now, is a column about anthologies.

Why anthologies? I hear you ask.

Glad you did. Well, first, you see, I really like anthologies. I've edited several, been in a number of them, and like to read 'em -- some of my earliest memories of the library involved checking out all those old (even then) books of Nebula winners and other sf stories and consuming volume after volume after volume. Secondly, it seems in today's shrinking market place for writers, there aren't as many magazines left to send stories to as, say, a decade or so ago. But there are a lot of anthologies out there. Three, I think it's a fun thing. So why not? I thought it would be interesting and so did Rich. Hence Anthology Attic.

And because my interests primarily lay with horror/dark fantasy/mystery and suspense, and since there are more of these anthologies out there, I'll be looking at them. But I might throw in an odd western anthology or some such -- just to keep you on your toes, of course.

By the way, an anthology is a selection of stories by *different* authors. You scoff. But there are a lot of people who don't know the difference between an anthology and a

single-author collection.

As some of you know I have edited anthologies in the past and hope to do so in the future. To keep from being excessively tacky I won't review the anthologies I've edited (although I will mention them, of course, if the occasion arises). I will review an anthology I'm in, but I won't say anything about my story. So there you are.

The reviews, due to space considerations, will be concise -- enough to give you a taste. And the column will be divided into three parts: Past, Present, Future.

The Present will be short reviews of anthologies currently out. I won't review each story, but just the ones that leap out at me (which doesn't mean, by the way, that the stories I don't mention aren't fine); also at the end of each review I'll list the other contributors. That way those of you who like to read certain authors' stories will know which volumes to turn to. The Future will give us an idea of what anthologies are being published in months to come; and the Past is a look back at anthologies of bygone years -- series, themed ones, those that tie in with movies, shared worlds, seasonal volumes, etc. Send me your suggestions; I'm fair-minded. Most of the time.

I have some prejudices about

things (such as I prefer original stories to reprint), but you'll be finding them out as we go along.

Present

Under The Fang (Robert R. McCammon, editor; *Pocket Books*; 336 pages; \$4.95; ISBN 0-671-69573-8)

Under The Fang is the first of three anthologies conceived of by Horror Writers of America (HWA), with stories by well-known and not-so-well-known members of the Writers' organization. Each volume deals with a particular premise thought up by the editor; the editor makes certain facts known (sort of the "bible" of the anthology), and the stories jump off from there.

Under The Fang involves the premise that the vampires have taken over the earth; humans are on the run, dead, or forced to underground activities. The time? It could be now; it could be just a step into the future.

While the concept may not be the most original (vampires being almost over done these days, and yet ... yet ... *I really* like to read vampire stories), the stories are good.

The anthology leads off with "The Miracle Mile" by McCammon, about a family's need to have a sane vacation in an insane world. I have to

say right here that I don't much like an editor putting his or her own story into the anthology; there's no law against it, but . . . I just don't care for it. So I approached this one with some hesitation; but then McCammon went ahead and did such a good engrossing story . . . what nerve!

Nancy A. Collins contributes a finely crafted -- and guaranteed to make you queasy -- story about night-clubs in "Dancing Nitely"; Al Sarrantonio looks to the future in "Red Eve." In "Duty" Ed Gorman paints a picture of a man who has to do his duty, no matter how distasteful, and in "Prodigal Sun," Thomas F. Monteleone provides us with a thoughtful -- and perhaps more advanced -- vampire. Charles de Lint explores Gypsies and their clash with the vampiric establishment in "We Are Dead Together," while Chet Williamson has a real gut-wrencher in "Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage." One of my favorites, though, was "Behind Enemy Lines" by Dan Perez because it provides us (humans, that is) with a ray of hope; it holds the position of final story in the volume, and I think McCammon chose wisely placing it there.

The stories range across many different themes -- from humor to adventure/thriller back to character study and everything in-between. That's a plus in a theme anthology -- no two stories are going to be too similar that way. Actually, I found myself wondering if there might not be a follow-up volume, something on the order of *Fang II*. I mean, there was so much that wasn't covered that would make top-notch stories. Hmmm . . .

Other contributors include Clint Collins, Sidney Williams and Robert Pettitt, Richard Laymon, J. N. Williamson, Lisa Cantrell, Brian Hodge, Suzy McKee Charnas and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, David N. Meyer III, Clifford V. Brooks.

Dead End: City Limits (Paul F. Olson and David B. Silva, editors; *St. Martin's Press*; 368 pages; \$19.95; ISBN

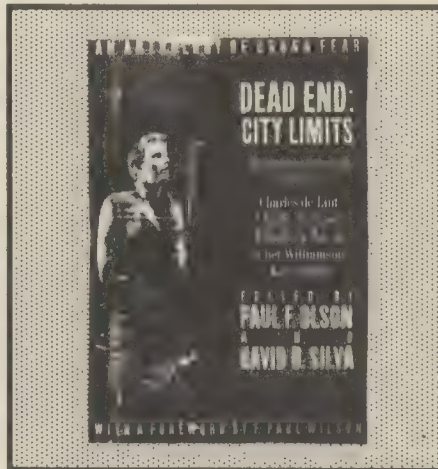
0-312-06328-8)

Well, this is a really grim anthology, but very good, and very chilling.

The premise is the writers had to do stories (Horror ones, of course; what else do you expect from cities these days?) about a city -- any city -- but the stories had to be set in the present, not in the future. Then the writers could go from there.

And boy, did they ever.

The Foreword by F. Paul Wilson and the Introduction by the editors are the most solid I've read in a long time.



"Parade" by Lawrence Watt-Evans is about some office mates who go outside and see a parade. Only it's not a holiday, is it? This is a really bizarre story. "Open Hearts" by Stephen Gresham looks at an agency of folks -- themselves disabled in one way or another -- who call people for donations. So what happens when one of them threatens to come after the telephone solicitors? And what happens when there's a storm outside and these folks are trapped? And what happens when there's a knock at the door? You get the idea. I really liked this story; I thought it was well-written and the characters were strong.

Poppy Z. Brite maintains her reputation of incredibly weird and incredibly compelling stories with "The Ash of Memory, The Dust of Desire." Chet Williamson delivers a

solid story of a man who wonders what it might be like to kill a nobody in "City Hunger," and Elizabeth Massie looks at children of the city in the gut-wrenching "Lock Her Room." Lois Tilton examines a "Changing Neighborhood" where the old immigrants are moving out to be replaced by new ones, while in "The Looking Glass Hand," Melissa Mia Hall introduces us to a little boy who takes on far too much responsibility.

Oh no, I thought, when I began the novelette, "Hell Train," by Gary L. Raisor, not another commuter train story. And then I got caught up in this. It is *not* just another subway horror story. This is a really compelling story of a man who works in what I think must be sheer hell (in New York City, underground) and what he finds there.

Other contributors include John Shirley, Steve Rasnic Tem, Thomas F. Monteleone, William Relling Jr., Charles L. Grant, Charles de Lint, David Bischoff, Gene O'Neill, and Lee Moler.

Cold Shocks (Tim Sullivan, editor; *Avon Books*; 309 pages; \$4.50; ISBN 0-380-76160-2)

Generally I like theme anthologies. *Cold Shocks* is not a great theme anthology, though. I think its tie-in with "cold" is a trifle tenuous; in one respect, the writers had more leeway with their stories (obviously they could explore any aspect of cold), but in some cases they almost seemed too far afield -- the settings could have been anywhere, perhaps.

Still there were some good stories.

Chet Williamson delivers another fine executed story in "First Kill" about a man on his yearly hunting trip, while Michael D. Toman delivers a chilling (pun intended) tale with "A Winter Memory." I really liked Toman's story; its ending surprised me, which, frankly, is unusual. "The Ice Downstream" is another strangely compelling familial tale by

Melanie Tem; in "Bring Me the Head of Timothy Leary," Nancy Holder proves she really has a sense of the weird; "The Bus" by Gregory Frost is a sad tale about a lost man getting even more lost; in "St. Jackaclsaws" by A. R. Morlan we see the disintegration of a boy during winter holidays.

One of the strongest stories is Michael Armstrong's "The Kikituk," a look at a youth in Alaska with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (his mother drank -- rather, swilled -- while she was carrying him, and he was born with mental defects) and the man who has looked after him for years. Another excellent story is "The Pavilion of Frozen Women" by S. P. Somtow about an American Indian woman more than a little out-of-place in Japan; it's compelling and well-written.

Other contributors include Gary Brandner, Edward Bryant, Dean Wesley Smith, Graham Masterson, Steve Rasnic Tem, Barry N. Malzberg, Gregory Nicoll, Tim Sullivan.

Obsessions (Gary Raisor, editor; *Dark Harvest*; 317 pages; \$21.95 (trade hardback); ISBN 0-913165-55-7)

Obsessions. Wow. What a natural for a theme anthology. It's a wonder someone didn't think of this before. And while not great, *Obsessions* is a good anthology. So many obsessions... where, oh, where to start? I don't want to mention which ones occur in what stories -- that's for you, the reader, to discover. Frankly, I hope there's a second volume in the works.

"In the Cold, Dark Time" is another twisted tale from the master of twistedness with a twang, Joe R. Lansdale; it's futuristic but none the less chilling for that. "Topsy" by F. Paul Wilson is black humor at its best. I had guessed the ending of "Killing Kate" by Ed Gorman long before I reached that point, but the story is so strong that didn't matter. Nancy Holder contributes another weird and wonderfully written -- and equally moving -- story in "Lady

Madonna." She just gets better and better with each story. Chet Williamson, who writes stories just too well, (I'm compelled to read them all!) looks at books and yet more books in "The Bookman." Kevin J. Anderson's "Hunter's Moon" is an historical horror story, the kind of sub-genre, if you can call it that, that I really like; this is a quiet shocker that just sort of creeps up on you. Dan Simmons has another solid, extremely good story in "The Counselor." However, I think the All-Time Shocker and Wake Up and Take Notice Story in this volume is "Richard's Head" by Al Sarrantonio -- very, very powerful.

Other contributors include Dean R. Koontz, Thomas F. Monteleone, John Shirley, Nicholas Royle, Scott A. Cupp, Bill Crider, Stanley Wiater, Richard Christian Matheson, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, L. Bradley Law, C. J. Henderson, Glen Vasey, Lori Perkins, Charles L. Grant, Dean Wesley Smith, Rick Hautala, Darrell Schweitzer, Edward Bryant, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Elizabeth Massie, A. R. Morlan, David B. Silva.

Future

January will see a paperback reprint of *Post Mortem* (originally published by *St. Martin's*) by *Dell Abyss*; this volume is edited by Paul L. Olson and David B. Silva, who collaborated again on *Dead End: City Limits*; while the latter book was about the city (as noted in the above review), the former involved ghosts, in one shape or another. January is also the publication month for *Dark Descent #3, Fabulous, Formless Darkness*, the last in this series by editor David G. Hartwell. This series was originally published as *The Dark Descent* in hardback by Tor.

In March, Ellen Datlow's *Alien Sex* will be reprinted by *Penguin/ROC*. I don't know how much mystery or horror it'll contain, but what the hey, I'll give it a look.

Come April -- which is looking very much like a busy month for anthologies -- we have *CUT! Horror*

Writers on Horror Film edited by Chris Golden; this volume, published by *Berkley*, contains essays about films of horror. And this is also the month for *The Year's Best Horror Stories XIX*, Karl Edward Wagner (*DAW*). Wagner can always be counted on for finding some unusual, not often seen stories.

Past

Dark Forces stands as a landmark anthology of its time (1980). Edited by agent Kirby McCauley and published by *Viking*, this book was sort of the one that started the whole business of horror anthologies. There had been some anthologies before, notably *Shadows* edited by Charles L. Grant and *Whispers* edited by Stuart David Schiff. But with the massive (for those days) *Dark Forces* people seemed to take notice. This is billed as "New Stories of Suspense and Supernatural Horror," and the contributors are a mixed crew: names that we now associate with horror/dark fantasy as well as those that we consider sf fiction or fantasy or mystery or mainstream, plus two cartoonists. Maybe that's the secret of the success of this anthology: McCauley didn't just take stories from the horror field; he went outside to see what other writers had to offer. After all, who ever said only horror writers could write horror?

Contributors of original fiction to *Dark Forces* were Dennis Etchison, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Edward Bryant, Davis Grubb, Robert Aickman, Karl Edward Wagner, Joyce Carol Oates, T. E. D. Klein, Gene Wolfe, Theodore Sturgeon, Ramsey Campbell, Clifford D. Simak, Russell Kirk, Lisa Tuttle, Robert Bloch, Edward Gorey, Ray Bradbury, Joe Hadelman, Charles L. Grant, Manly Wade Wellman, Richard Matheson and Richard Christian Matheson, Gahan Wilson, Stephen King.

That's all for now. Keep reading.

A DISTURBING NOTION

MICHAEL THOMAS DILLON

MICHAEL THOMAS DILLON has sold short stories to several publications -- including *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine* and *Midnight Zoo* -- since his short-short, "Spitting Image," (his first published story) appeared in the Summer issue of *Cemetery Dance*. That story was very well-received by *CD's* readership, as I'm sure the following slice of creepiness will be.

David didn't know what to make of the newest guest of the Bentford City Pound.

Hank, the animal warden who worked the evening shift and who had brought the dog in, had told him that it might be best to "put this one down quickly," but David was not prepared for what he had seen when he'd looked inside the pen. He had expected to find a sick or aged or crippled animal, not the healthy specimen before him.

He squatted down in front of the pen for a better look at the dog. The bare bulbs depending from the ceiling above each pen were not very adequate. They created many shadows.

At first, when David had seen it from the far end of the long walkway flanked on either side by rows of pens, he had not thought it to be a dog at all. Oddly enough, he had thought it to be some kind of monkey. But now, up close, he could see that it was at least half German Shepard, and looked nothing at all like a primate.

However, it was the *other half* of the creature that David didn't quite know what to make of. There was nothing that David could really put his finger on, but it was an overall look about the animal that just wasn't right. It had all the markings of a German Shepard, yet there was something in the way that it held itself that was not natural.

It was sitting back on its haunches, like many canines will do when they're begging for scraps from the table. Only it didn't have its front legs drawn up below its chin with paws dangling, as is usual when a dog does this. Instead, its front legs hung at its sides, much, David found himself thinking, as a man's arms might.

David found this notion rather disturbing. He couldn't explain why, but felt somewhat alarmed that such a thought would enter his head. It somehow frightened him.

He suddenly realized that Hank must have felt the

same way. Why else would he have suggested putting down such an obviously healthy animal?

David turned and looked into the animal's eyes for the first time.

For some reason he had avoided doing so earlier. Perhaps because he had sensed that the dog had been watching him intently from the very first moment he had entered the compound area.

Too intently.

Perhaps, also, because he had been afraid of what he might have seen in those eyes if he had looked.

But what he saw now, was only the dark, liquid eyes of a dog.

Then the animal sprung at David without warning. Its muzzle struck the wire mesh with enough impact to rattle the entire pen.

David was so surprised by the dog's sudden attack that he fell to the concrete floor. But it quickly became apparent that the dog wasn't trying to attack him; it was simply trying to greet its master.

David realized this when he saw the tall man in the white smock standing over him.

By the way he was dressed, with the knee-length smock and the ID badge pinned to his breast pocket, David figured the man to be a scientist from the government research laboratory across town. He recalled that Hank had picked the dog up very close to that vicinity.

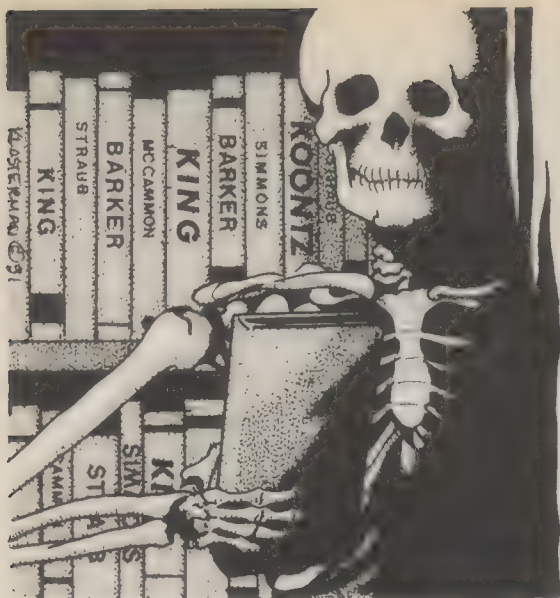
Feeling somewhat foolish, stretched on his back on the floor of the compound as he was, David started to explain himself, but stopped when he saw the hypodermic needle descending.

He felt its sting at the base of his neck.

As he began to drift away into unconsciousness, David watched the man in the white smock remove his pet from the pen. He only wished that he would have blacked out before the man asked it if it were all right.

And the dog answered him in perfect English.

-- CD



TYSON BLUE

NEEDFUL KINGS & OTHER THINGS

Some of you former *Castle Rock* readers may remember *Castle Schlock: the Stephen King Parody Newsletter*, the good-natured spoof of *CR* produced by a young Michigan policeman named Ray Rexer, whose gentle wit and zany sense of humor took anything there may have been in being made fun of and threw it aside. It is with a very real sense of loss and sadness that I report that late in April, Ray walked into an ambush and was shot and killed.

I only met Ray Rexer once, at the first Horrorfest in Colorado back in 1989, but we kept loosely in touch after that, and I always enjoyed hearing from him and got a kick out of what he had to say. In fact, while cleaning up around the house recently, I ran across a tape he had sent me after the convention, and made a mental note to drop him a line and see how he was doing. That weekend, Steve Spignesi called me from Connecticut and told me that it was too late.

So, to Ray Rexer, wherever he may be, this is just a quick note to say that Tyris Green (my *Castle Schlock* pseudonym) and a host of others in the horror community will miss you.

Stephen King now has a new job description -- he is a "symbolic analyst," according to Robert H. Reich, an economics "guru" at Har-

vard's JFK School of Government. In his book, *The Work of Nations*, Reich theorizes that there is a new trend in the world economy which rewards those who solve problems and manipulate information, creating three basic types of jobs: Routine production services, which includes persons who work on assembly lines or simply feed data into computers; IN-person services, which includes people providing services directly to customers; and at the top of the heap are the Symbolic Analysts, who use and manipulate words and data, as well as solve problems. This top category includes lawyers, entertainers, writers, executives, and so forth. A recent newspaper article about this led off by stating that under this new scenario, Lee Iacocca, Madonna and King all share the same job title. And so do I. Now, if I could just get my fair share of all the rewards Reich says I'm supposed to be getting...

King's latest scheduled fiction appearance is one of his best short stories in recent years, a novelette entitled *You Know They Got A Helluva Band*. A couple out for a drive gets lost on a back road and winds up in the Rockwellian town of Rock 'n' Roll Heaven, Oregon, where Janis Joplin waits tables in the local malt shop, serving food cooked up by Rick Nelson. Outside, Jim Morrison leans on a corner and watches the car hiss

by. You get the picture.

Of course, even dead rock stars need an audience, so ordinary folks who go in one end of town have a habit of not passing right through. King's premise is played out with just enough tongue in cheek to keep things humorous, which is not to say that there aren't a few good chills salted throughout the proceedings as well, particularly in the middle of the story when things really start to unravel.

This is a fine short piece, better, for instance, than "Home Delivery," from Skipp and Spector's *Book of the Dead*, which seemed to be the start of an aborted novel and ended very abruptly without resolving a number of plot threads. Here, there is a beginning, a middle, and an end, and a lot of macabre fun from start to finish.

The only real problem I had with it was that it seemed to be an idea which could have been developed more, perhaps as a novella. The story will appear in Pocket Books' original anthology *Shock Rock*, edited by Jeff Gelb.

Those of you who were not fortunate enough to obtain a copy of the Donald M. Grant edition of *The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands*, take heart -- NAL has published a trade edition of that novel. The trade paperback edition features a new cover with illustrations by Phil Hef-

fernan (front) and Don Brautigan (back), and containing all of the Ned Dameron illustrations and illuminations which appeared in the Grant edition, except for the endpapers.

Nor will that be the only new King material available at that time. King is currently working on a new novel, *Gerald's Game*, which is tentatively set for publication in early September 1992. There is no word as yet on what the novel is about, but we'll let you know as soon as possible. Sources at Viking report that the novel is a little shorter than *Needful Things*. King's office reports that the novel will be published ahead of *Delores Claiborne*, the last novel produced in the notorious four-book deal of a few years back.

King also contributed a short nonfiction piece entitled "Perfect Games, Shared Memories" to the 1991 World Series Souvenir Scorebook. The story deals with two World Series games King watched, one by himself on TV in the '50's, the other at Fenway with his son Owen in 1986, and King tells how the greatest thing about baseball is the way it brings generations together, creating a tradition passed on from father to son. It is illustrated with a color photo of King, his winter beard just coming in, wearing an old Brooklyn Dodgers shirt and cap. Like most of King's baseball-oriented fiction, it shows a side seldom seen by readers who simply know his horror novels. The book retails for \$6.00 plus \$1.50 postage and handling; write or call Major League Baseball Properties, 350 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022 for ordering information.

On the personal appearance front, King appeared on the Today Show on October 17, after getting bumped the previous day by the foofaraw over Clarence Thomas, the new Supreme Court Justice (Personally, I think that having an arrogant, paranoid conservative like Clarence Thomas on the Supreme Court is a shitload scarier than any novel I've ever read, but what do I know?). Sporting a beard and a ponytail, King

spoke about *Needful Things*, the upcoming film version of that novel, with Rob Reiner directing a screenplay by Larry Cohen (who also wrote "Carrie" and "IT,") and his hopes for a revival of activism in the wake of the Thomas confirmation.

King has made a couple of appearances on the juvenile scene which might have slipped by you, were you not fortunate enough to have children who can point these things out to you. The first was in the October, 1991 issue of *Disney Adventures Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 12. The issue features a one-page feature entitled "A Warning From Stephen King," wherein King writes

Here's an interesting piece of King trivia. Do you recall Billy DeLois, the janitor and amateur taxidermist who was Harlan's friend at Falco plains? Turns out that Billy was a classmate of Carrie White, who cut French class in King's first novel. This is typical of the many in-jokes scattered throughout the series, and this was one which no one but King himself would have been likely to catch -- except, of course, for King concordancer Steve Spignesi, who brought this to my attention during a recent visit to New Haven.

In October, Penguin/HighBridge released the audio version of *Needful Things*, read by King him-



about the winner of the magazine's scary-story contest, which King judged.

Of even more interest is King's appearance in the September 6, 1991 issue of *Scholastic Voice*, Vol 76, No. 1. The magazine, distributed to schools, features King on the cover. Inside is a brief interview with King, followed by a seven-page play, "Stephen King's Trucks," adapting his short story of the same name, which also served as the basis for "Maximum Overdrive." King's office reports that he did not write the play, but it does utilize extensive language and dialogue from the original short story, and the copyright notice indicates that the performance rights rest with him.

self. The unabridged, 27-hour reading appears on eighteen cassettes, and is available in two formats -- either a huge boxed set containing the entire novel, retailing for around \$89.95, or in three six-cassette packages for \$29.95.

King has definitely settled into his role as a reader now, and his performance on this massive reading is very enjoyable. He even sings a little, although it might be best if he not give up his day job, yet. The tapes have no sound effects to speak of, unless you want to count the ringing of the store bell when characters enter or leave. There is a little mood music from time to time, mostly to signal the beginning and end of tapes. On the whole, the opportunity to hear

King read his final Castle Rock story is one that most King fans will find hard to pass up, despite the high price tag.

And there's more audio King on the horizon as well. King will be reading *The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands* for an unabridged audio release. The tapes will be released in January, 1992, by Penguin HighBridge Audio. There is no information available as to length or price as yet, but the novel is expected to be in the \$30 to \$40 range. Nor, as has been the case with the two previous *Dark Tower* audio releases, is there expected to be a signed, limited edition. More on that as it develops.

King also figures in a pair of essays in John Updike's latest collection of essays and criticism, *Odd Jobs*, just out from Knopf. In the first, "High Art vs. Popular Culture," King figures prominently in Updike's effort to define what separates the two, if anything, stating that bestselling authors like King make connoisseurs of higher literature uneasy.

A few pages later, in a speech called "How Does the Writer Imagine?," Updike uses King as a prime example of "A generation of novelists . . . that has been deeply penetrated by the narrative vocabulary of television."

It's always nice to see King getting this kind of high-profile recognition from an established literary voice, although King fans might find the book's \$35.00 price tag a bit steep for these brief mentions.

On the motion picture front, Columbia is producing "Sleepwalkers," a new film with an original screenplay by King. The film concerns a pair of strange, shape-shifting beings (mother and son) who take up residence in a small Maine town near Castle Rock. Although the young man seems at first glance to be the ideal date to Bring Home To Mom, he soon proves to be something far more sinister.

The film is directed by Mick Garris, and stars Brian Crouse, Madchen Amick and Alice Krige, a South

African actress best-known to genre fans for her role as the ghost in the film version of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*. In addition, King will be making an appearance in the film, along with John Landis and Clive Barker, the latter making his screen acting debut.

The latest word on *The Stand*, received from King's office just before presstime, is that the project will be done as an ABC miniseries. The screenplay for the Laurel project will be written by King himself. Whether it will now be based on the original version of the novel, or the uncut version, is not clear at this time.

In addition, Laurel intends to produce an ending for CBS's "Stephen King's Golden Years," although there is no word on when that will happen either.

New on the "Books-About-Stephen King" front are several new books, each of which makes major contributions to the field of King criticism. In late 1990, the noted Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot scholar Carroll F. Terrell published his *Stephen King: Man and Artist*. Terrell teaches at the University of Maine at Orono, where some twenty years ago he taught Stephen King. The book provides some new anecdotal material about King's work, exploring several major themes which appear throughout King's canon, including the religious and mystical elements.

These elements have only been touched on by other writers, most notably in Anthony Magistrale's recent Starmont House book, *The Moral Voyages of Stephen King*.

Terrell's book is one of the first scholarly examinations of King's work, aside from Michael Collings' books and the Twayne Authors' Series book on King published a couple of years back. This is important from the standpoint of it being a step toward legitimizing King in the eyes of serious literary scholars. When I said that King was a writer to be considered with Shakespeare, Faulkner and so forth, I was ridiculed by main-

stream critics. When Terrell says it, it somehow seems more legitimate.

At any rate, although not for every King fan, this is a book which must be read by anyone who is seriously studying King and his work. The book is illustrated by Kenny Ray Linkous, who illustrated *The Eyes of the Dragon* in its original edition, as well as providing illustrations for *The Stephen King Companion* and the cover and some art for *The Unseen King*. It is available in three limited editions, priced at \$150, \$125, and \$50, from Northern Lights Publishing Company, Inc., 493 College Avenue, Orono, ME 04473.

Also recently released is *The Stephen King Story*, George Beahm's hardcover critical biography of King from Andrews & McMeel, who also published his first book on the subject, *The Stephen King Companion*, a few years back.

Story is a must-have book for any serious King fan, as it is the first serious attempt at a King biography since Douglas Winter's seminal *Stephen King: The Art of Darkness*, way back in 1984. Beahm has delved far more into King's biography than did Winter in his book, and of particular interest to readers will be the wealth of photographs, many never seen before, of King's childhood home and haunts, some of his friends, and so forth.

There are illustrations by Kenny Ray Linkous, who, under the name Kenneth R. Linkhauser, illustrated the Philtrum Press edition of *The Eyes of the Dragon* and also appeared in Beahm's *Companion*, Steve Spignesi's *The Shape Beneath the Sheet*, and my *The Unseen King*.

Serious King students will be saddened to learn of the death of Ted Dikty, the publisher and founder of Starmont House, which has been a major publisher of King criticism from the very beginning, with the publication of Winter's *Reader's Guide* in the early 80's. Dikty died in mid-October, peacefully, among his books, from a heart attack, according to a letter we received from his daughter

Barbara, who has taken over the duties of running Starmont.

Starmont has published more books about King and his work than anyone else, including Michael Collings' series of excellent studies, as well as books by Darrell Schweitzer, David Engebretson, Anthony Magistrale and others.

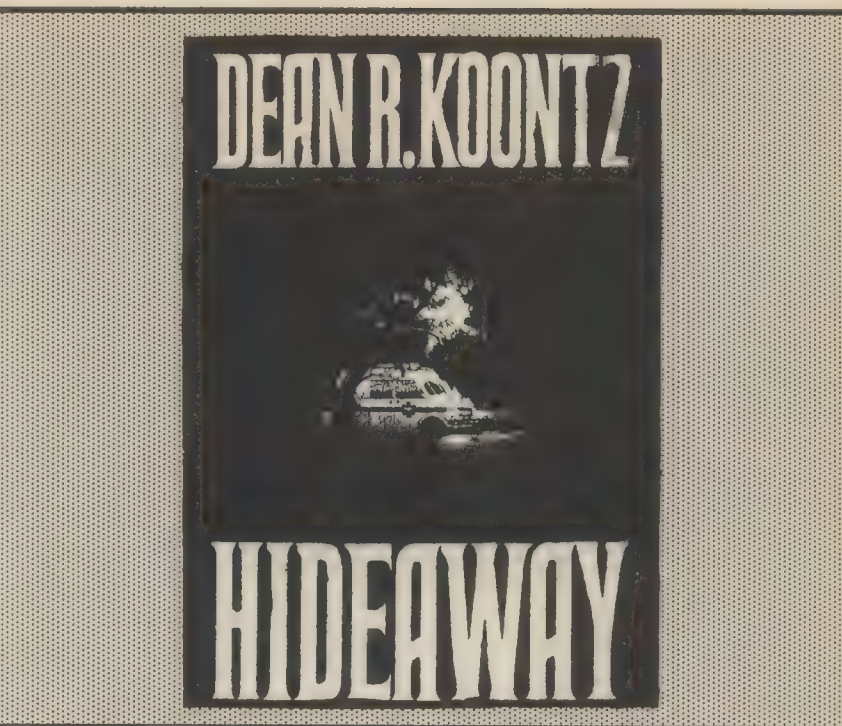
The company will continue its schedule of publishing, and will continue to consider and accept new manuscripts as well. King-related projects in the hopper include my *Observations From the Terminator* and an ongoing series of essay collections edited by Anthony Magistrale, along the lines of his already-published *The Shining Reader*.

Coming in July 1992 from NAL is *The Stephen King Quiz Book II*, compiled once more by Steve Spignesi. As with the previous quiz book, this one features detailed quizzes on everything King, with a new feature -- Celebrity Guest Quizzes by a number of King experts. Mine is about Castle Rock. The book is scheduled to hit the stands the same day as the paperback version of *Needful Things*.

**

This year is a busy one for Dean R. Koontz. There's a new novel, entitled *Hideaway*. It starts out in the breakthrough field of resuscitation medicine -- the science of bringing people back to life who have been clinically dead for periods of up to an hour. In Koontz' novel, antique dealer Hatch Harrison dies when his car plunges into an icy mountain river. He is revived seemingly without any problems after eighty minutes as a clinically dead person.

But then things start to happen. He begins having strange dreams about killing people, dreams whose reality pops up in the next day's paper. Gradually, he begins to think that perhaps he brought something else along with him from the other side . . . and since this is a Koontz novel, that's only the beginning!



The novel features the sinister Vassago, one of Koontz' finest villains, a psychopathic killer who lives in Hell, which is located in an abandoned amusement park. When he finds himself inexplicably psychically linked to Harrison, he begins stalking him, for his own sinister purposes.

This is one of Koontz' best novels. The suspense and the speed of the narrative combine to make this one of the fastest-reading novels from Koontz I have ever run across. The climax, with Hatch and his wife Lindsey racing to save their adopted daughter from a horrible death, rivals the classic plane-crash sequence from last year's *Cold Fire* for sheer page-turning suspense.

There are also plans, once the book comes out, for Putnam to produce a deluxe limited edition, just as they did with *Cold Fire*. As with the previous book, the limited will feature wraparound dustjacket art by Don Brautigan, different from the trade edition, and will feature interior illustrations by Phil Parks. Anyone who has seen the *Cold Fire* limited knows what a fine job they did with that book, and knows they

are in for a treat.

Plans are also afoot for the small press Charnel House to release a deluxe edition of Koontz' classic novel *Demon Seed*, as soon as Koontz has a chance to revise the novel to bring the computer technology in the book up to contemporary standards.

In the meantime, Berkley has rereleased Koontz' early novel *The Voice of the Night*, originally published under Koontz' Brian Coffey pseudonym. The novel, which tells the story of two boys, one shy and introverted, one outgoing and immensely popular, who enter into what proves to be an unsavory and ultimately dangerous relationship one summer in a small town on the California coast. Although a fairly long novel, it reads very quickly, due in part to Koontz' storytelling ability. Those who haven't managed to track down a copy of this one in the second-hand shops would be well-advised to pick it up.

The film version of *Servants of Twilight* has been completed, and although Koontz says that it is the best of the recent films to be based on his work, the project has still been shot on a very small budget and seemed

virtually assured of a straight-to-video release. However, instead it turned up on *Showtime* in October, and proved to be fairly faithful to the novel, although the filmmakers chose to do away with the novel's snowy climax and to completely change the ending. Go figure . . .

If you're interested in more information about the film, you might check out *Fangoria* #105, which has a fairly lengthy article about it, illustrated with lots of color photos and so forth.

There is some good news on the film front for Koontz fans, hopefully. Koontz has written a screenplay for *Cold Fire*, and is hoping to get Farhad Mann, the director of "Face of Fear" to helm it. The two are hoping to hammer out a deal which will leave them with some degree of control over the finished product. We'll keep you posted.

In addition, Warner Brothers still has an option on Koontz' delightful book for children of all ages, *Oddkins*, and the project is reported on Tim Burton's slate. Since Burton is tied up with the second Batman film, that's not likely to come to fruition anytime soon, but the notion has a lot of potential to develop into a really fine film. Keep your fingers crossed . . .

Koontz is also writing the Afterword for Ed Gorman's short story collection, *Prisoners & Other Stories*, due this Spring from CD Publications (the publishers of this magazine).

Clive Barker has an ambitious year planned (for more information, see my interview with him elsewhere in this issue). Last fall, Harper/Collins published *Imajica*, Barker's latest fantasy novel. This one is set in the Imajica, a series of five interlocking dimensional worlds, each with its own cultures and lifeforms, of which our Earth is one. It is the story of a man named Gentle, a woman named Judith, and a creature named Pie'oh'Pah who is neither male nor female. This romantic threesome finds itself pulled into an adventure

which begins on earth and winds throughout the other four dominions, as their lives' paths become interwoven with the process of reconciling the earth into the other four worlds once more.

The story manages to hold readers' attention throughout its 824-page length by continually surprising them. The biggest shock comes about halfway through the novel, when the main characters suddenly learn that they really know nothing about themselves or their true identities, and that they are much more closely connected to the other worlds of the Imajica than they had at first thought.

This is the most ambitious and enjoyable of Barker's novels I've read. His skills at characterization continue to develop, while his imagination and creativity, always his strong points, are as amazing as ever.

Recently, I asked Rich Chizmar if, since his ad copy listed mystery as a genre within the scope of *CD*, I could include mention of mystery novels I found enjoyable. Certainly, he replied, so here goes:

Ed McBain has been a familiar name to mystery fans since the 50's, and is best known for his forty-plus novels featuring the detectives of the 87th Precinct. This Fall, however, McBain moves away from his imaginary city of Isola to New York City in his latest novel, *Downtown*.

When Michael Barnes, a Florida-based orange farmer, engages an attractive female lawyer in conversation at a Manhattan bar on Christmas Eve, he sets in motion a chain of events which will plunge him into the most nightmarish 48 hours of his life, as he finds himself suddenly on the run in a strange city, pursued by the police for a murder he did not commit, and by others who want to make sure that he doesn't get the chance to tell anyone what he knows.

Accompanied only by Connie Kee, a beautiful Chinese limo driver, Barnes moves through the seamy nightworld of downtown New York, encountering film directors, actors, cross-dressers, mobsters, hit men,

hatchet men, fortune-cookie stuffers and many others. The novel is a rip-roaring adventure written with tongue planted firmly in cheek in the inimitable McBain style.

The touch here is much lighter than that found in most of his novels, and there is little of the police procedural style common to the 87th novels. It is closer in tone to one of his Matthew Hope novels, although the humorous element is far stronger.

Fans of Ed McBain will find a trip *Downtown* a neat change of pace and infinitely rewarding. For those of you who have not yet given a McBain novel a try, it's a great place to start.

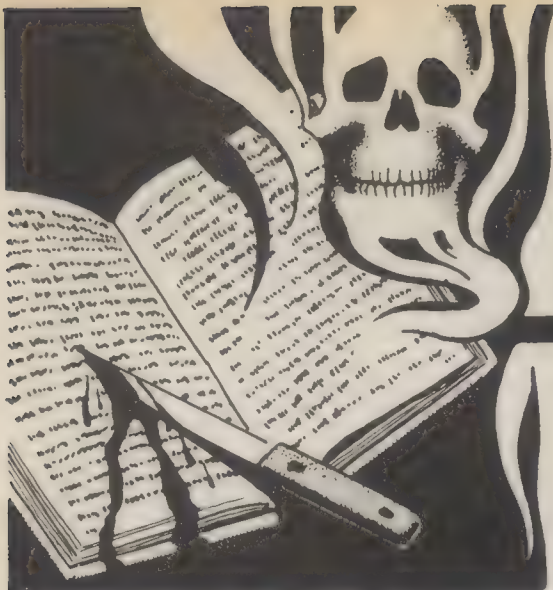
Besides which, it will make great reading while you wait until the February '92 release of *Kiss*, the next 87th Precinct novel.

Stuart Woods is a fast-rising star on the mystery scene, and from his award-winning first novel, *Chiefs*, through last year's amazing *Palindrome*, his novels are among the most-awaited for me each year. His latest, *New York Dead*, is a worthy addition to his canon.

As New York detective Stone Barrington is walking home from a bar late one evening, he finds himself thrust into a complex mystery when rising TV new star Sasha Nijinsky becomes a falling star, plunging twelve stories from her apartment balcony to land almost at his feet.

Amazingly, the woman is still alive, and when the ambulance taking her to a hospital is struck by a fire truck, she vanishes. All of the above happens within the first twenty pages of this novel, and for the rest of the time, Barrington and his partner search the Big Apple for the answers to a maze of questions, foremost among which is the biggest one -- is this a murder or not?

Although this novel is not as good as *Chiefs*, *Palindrome* or *Under the Lake*, it is still a top-notch mystery thriller. Even Woods' off-novels are above average, and this is one not to be missed.



CD BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEWS by Mike Baker

Offspring by Jack Ketchum, Diamond, November 1991, 265 pp., \$4.50, (ISBN 1-55773-615-4)

Offspring is the sequel to Jack Ketchum's first novel, the highly successful, as well as controversial, *Off Season*. If you somehow missed that ultra-violent gem (one of the best horror novels of the '80s), it told the story of a cannibalistic family living like savages in the Maine wilderness and a group of New Yorkers who have the misfortune of running into them.

Offspring takes place 12 years later, and there are only two returning characters: Sheriff Peters, who has since retired, and one of the savages, a girl who (barely) lived through the massacre at the end of the first book's end. In the intervening years, the girl has survived by moving up and down the coastline, slowly building a family of her own by stealing children and raising them in a feral manner.

Ketchum has matured quite a bit as a writer in the ten years since *Off Season*; his prose is smoother, his characterization is defter and he's mastered pacing (once the action starts, you can't put this book down). He's also realized the value of restraint. *Offspring* has a goodly amount of gore, but nowhere near as much as its predecessor, and that works in the book's favor. Rather than bathe the reader in total carnage, he carefully places the shocks for optimum effect so that when the nasty stuff does happen, it really packs a punch.

Jack Ketchum will probably never be a household name -- he's much too daring, and uncommercial, for that to ever happen -- and that's a shame because he's an excellent writer who deserves far more recognition than he's received. If you've never read Ketchum before, give

him a try! *Offspring* is as good a place as any to start. Recommended.

**

Tunnelvision, by R. Patrick Gates, Dell/Abyss, November 1991, 430 pp., \$4.50, (ISBN 0-440-21090-9)

R. Patrick Gates' last novel, *Grimm Memorials*, was one of my favorite books from last year, so I was anxiously awaiting this novel. Then I got a copy and discovered that, like many of the other Abyss books, it was more of a psychological thriller with horrific overtones than a straight-out horror novel. While I was initially disappointed, I soon found myself getting caught up in, and enjoying, *Tunnelvision*.

One thing I admire about Gates is that he has a knack for creating characters you care about, and that he also has no qualms about inflicting harm upon them. In his books, no one is safe, a fact which greatly increases the suspense level.

Tunnelvision is not without its flaws. The early passages -- the reader's first introduction to the killer's twisted mind -- make little sense; rather than tantalizing me, they just made me long for properly structured sentences. And the plot and dialogue slip at times, becoming almost formulaic, especially when Gates, a police detective with a troubled past and a drinking problem, is the center of attention. Compared to the killer, who is simultaneously pathetic and terrifying, he's a real nothing.

Tunnelvision isn't a book for the squeamish; not only are the killer's acts of violence graphically depicted (he videotapes the killings and sends the tapes to the police), there is also a child pornography sub-plot. The book is filled with powerful material which, thankfully, is handled in a non-exploitive manner, a fact which makes it all the more gut-wrenching.

Tunnelvision is a strong book, and one not to be missed if that's your taste. Recommended.

■

Masques IV, edited by J.N. Williamson, Maclay & Associates, October 1991, 246 pp., \$19.95 (ISBN 0-940776-26-X)

The latest edition of this lauded anthology series, is like many recent short story collections, a rather uneven affair; while it has its high points, there are also a few lows, too.

Masques IV contains 23 new stories, one reprint, and two poems. I particularly enjoyed Gahan Wilson's "Sea Gulls," Darrell Schweitzer's "Savages," and F. Paul Wilson's "Please Don't Hurt Me." But the high point of the collection is easily Dan Simmons' "My Private Memoirs of the Hoffer Stigmata Pandemic," a look at what could happen if a person's faults and weaknesses physically manifested themselves as diseases. It lulls you into a false sense of security by taking jabs at well-known figures (Barbara Bush is afflicted by Ultimate Arrogance Syndrome, which gives her a face-turned-inside-out look while Dan Quayle is struck by a case of stupidity sarcoma so severe, he literally melts) and then delivers a devastating sucker punch. Look for this one on the award's ballots next year.

As anthologies go, *Masques IV* is above average and worth checking out. Recommended.

■

Now We Are Sick, edited by Neil Gaiman & Stephen Jones, Dreamhaven Books, October 1991, 93 pp., \$20.00, (ISBN 0-9630944-0-8)

Dreamhaven Books' first venture into the wonderful world of publishing, *Now We Are Sick*, is a collection of nasty and twisted children's poetry by well-known horror and science fiction writers like Ramsey Campbell, James Herbert, Brian Aldiss, Gene Wolfe, Harry Adam Knight, Terry Pratchett, S.P. Somtow, Robert Bloch, and many others. It also has a cover illustration drawn by the multi-talented Clive Barker, and an extremely funny *About The Contributors* section.

Because it had a rather limited print run -- there are only 1000 copies of the trade edition -- *Now We Are Sick* might be a little difficult to find, but it's definitely worth the search, especially if you have a sick sense of humor (like me). Recommended.

■

Shock Rock, edited by Jeff Gelb, Pocket, January 1992, 270 pp., \$4.99, (ISBN 0-671-70150-9)

Being a lifelong lover of rock-and-roll (and, like Gelb, an ex-DJ), I expected to enjoy *Shock Rock* much more than I actually did. It's a decent anthology; it's just lacking that certain something that would make it great. Maybe it's because you just can't translate the power of rock music into words. No matter the skill of the writer, there's no comparing a written description of a concert to actually being front-and-center at one; the best you can hope for is a pale imitation of the real thing. Words just can't capture the nuances of the music, or the ferocity of a mosh pit; they're something you have to experience for yourself to fully appreciate.

Shock Rock starts off well, with Stephen King's "You Know They Got A Hell Of A Band," -- some of his best writing, in my opinion -- but things go downhill after that. There are some standouts, like the always dependable Richard Christian Matheson's "Groupies" and Thomas Tessier's really twisted "Addicted To Love," but most of the other stories are just average, while some even sink to the level of downright dumb (there are a couple where the ending is obvious right from the very start, and one was so preachy, so self-righteous and PC, it made me want to throw up).

One thing *Shock Rock* has going for it is the fact that most of the stories aren't very long. With the exception of the King tale, few run over 15 pages, and most are much less than that. This brevity not only makes for quick reading, but also less pain when you encounter one of the dogs; bad though it may be, you know it'll be over soon.

Shock Rock may not be great, but it's still enjoyable, and therefore recommended.

■

Dumford Blues, by S.K. Epperson, St. Martin's Press, November 1991, 296 pp., \$18.95 (ISBN 0-312-06342-3)

S.K. Epperson's debut novel, *Brother Lowdown*, was an excellent thriller peopled with fascinating characters. It's more of the same with her latest, *Dumford Blues*; once again the suspense level is high and the characters believable (and, in some cases, quite scary).

Things aren't happy in the once-peaceful town of Dumford, Kansas, population 999; there's been a rash of animal mutilations, and the garbage collector has met a violent death which some people think was suicide, but local cop Ben Portlock is sure was murder. It's up to him to figure out who the killer is before they strike again. But in order to do that, he has to take a trip back into his own troubled past.

On the surface, *Dumford Blues* is a mystery, but it's really more than that. As is true with many of Raymond Chandler's novels, this book is actually a character study; who killed who and why ends up being secondary to the reactions and interactions of the various characters. *Dumford Blues* is more than just a whodun-

nit, it's a look at how, even in supposedly peaceful small towns, corruption and evil occurs.

In fact, the weakest thing in *Dumford Blues* is the mystery; it's fairly simple to guess the killer's identity before it's revealed. But not that that really matters. The characterization in this book is so right on, you don't really care. Epperson has a definite knack for creating believable characters, ones which end up sticking in your memories, and twisting the genre's clichés. Just like in real life, things aren't always as they seem.

Another thing I really enjoyed about this book was the realistic portrayal of violence. This isn't one of those books where shooting or stabbing someone has all the effect of a cream pie to the face; acts of violence don't occur very often, but when they do, they tend to be devastatingly effective.

If S.K. Epperson continues to write novels of the caliber of *Brother Lowdown* and *Dumford Blues*, I'm sure she'll have a long and prestigious career. Recommended.

♦♦

Darkborn, by Matthew Costello, Diamond, February 1992, 332 pp., (ISBN 1-55773-660-X)

I've read so many horror novels, it's hard to catch me by surprise. It does happen sometimes, and when I am successfully caught off-guard, it makes an impression on me.

Matthew Costello's latest, *Darkborn*, made a big impression on me. Not only has he taken one of the most overused themes in horror fiction and done something new and unique with it, he's managed to pull the whole thing off in an unobtrusive manner, too. Like a meticulously plotted mystery, all the clues are presented to the reader, so nothing should really come as a surprise . . . even though it does. That's because the plot is so engrossing, you get caught up in it and miss the subtle nuances. Then you reach the ending, and you begin to think back to what has gone before, and it all comes together. That's good storytelling, something which is lacking from many of today's horror novels. Writers looking for an example of effective pacing and structure need look no farther than this book.

Darkborn tells the deceptively simple tale of some Jesuit high school seniors who get drunk and decide to summon a demon. Actually it's much more than that, but I don't want to spoil any of the surprises, so I won't say anything else but this: *Darkborn* will keep you guessing right up until the very end. Highly recommended.

♦♦

The Official Splatter Movie Guide: Volume Two, by John McCarty, St. Martin's Press, February 1992, 208

pp., \$12.95 (ISBN 0-312-07046-2)

The man who coined the phrase "splatter movie" is back with another guide to the films Siskel & Ebert don't talk about very often: the juicy, red ones which horror fans crave. This edition covers what has been released since Volume One came out in 1989 (including direct-to-video releases) and adds some older films which failed to make it into the first book.

Unlike some other review books (which shall remain nameless), it's obvious that McCarty and his crew of reviewers have actually seen what they're talking about; not only are the reviews honest and informative, they've got a sense of humor, too (something that's essential when you're dealing with "classics" like *Monster* and *Movie House Massacre*). And they cover mainstream films, too, so you'll find listings for everything from *Die Hard* to *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, as well as other ultra-violent action films.

In addition to the reviews you also get an amazingly comprehensive Directors Directory (featuring genre legends like Dario Argento, George Romero, and David Cronenberg, as well as lesser-knowns like Lucio Fulci and Umberto Lenzi) and a not-even-close-to comprehensive listing of splatter sub-genres like Power Tools, Twelve Most Ripped-off Movies, Chainsaw Duels, Killer Santa, and many more.

Both volumes of *The Official Splatter Movie Guide* are required reading for any horror film fan; they're the kind of book which is easy to pick up, but nearly impossible to put down. Highly recommended.

♦♦

Bad Brains, by Kathe Koja, Dell/Abyss, March 1992, 367 pp., \$4.50 (ISBN 0-440-21114-X)

Kathe Koja's debut novel, *The Cipher*, was both a critical and commercial success. I didn't much care for it, though; there was too much style, and too little substance, for my taste. So when I picked up *Bad Brains*, I wasn't expecting much, and I ended up being pleasantly surprised. *Bad Brains* starts off slow, but when it finally gets moving, it's a damn good book.

Bad Brains' plot is refreshingly original. Austen, a talented, but unsuccessful, painter is leading a dull, boring, artistically dead life when he trips in a 7-Eleven parking lot and suffers a severe head injury which lands him in the hospital. During his convalescence, Austen begins to see a blurry silver shape moving in the periphery of his vision. He's eventually declared cured and released from the hospital, but when he returns home, he discovers that the silver thing has followed him, and that it's no longer content to just lurk in the shadows; it skitters over the surface of his mirror and flows across the ceiling. Reality and dream blur for Austen, who starts to

question his sanity. He visits a series of doctors, none of whom can offer a valid explanation for the "hallucinations" he's experiencing. Eventually Austen takes to the road in a desperate attempt to piece together the wreckage of his life (as well as his mind).

Bad Brains is kind of a road trip horror novel, and that's what makes it so enjoyable. Austen meets up with a string of interesting characters during his journey, all of whom are wonderfully brought to life by Koja. For example, there's Russell, a good ol' boy from Texas who joins Austen on his journey. Russell's father suffered from epilepsy, and that creates a strong bond between the two men. Russell believes that people like Austen and his father are visionaries and that their disfunctional brains are gifts from God. Russell's a great character -- he's kind-hearted and street smart, but not too bright -- and he livens up every scene he's in. Just as intriguing are Dr. Quiet, an extremely odd pseudo-physician, and Emily, Austen's cold, but still-loved, ex-wife. They're fleshed-out people, not cliches, and you end up caring about them.

Horror writers should sit up and take notice of what Koja is doing; rather than reworking tired plots and themes, she's striving to do something new and different, and while the results aren't always perfect -- plot sometimes takes a back seat to style and symbolism, and the pace occasionally drags -- they're at least original.

Bad Brains isn't for everyone, but I'm sure it will please any horror fan looking for something new and different. Recommended.

REVIEWS
by Roman A. Ranieri

A Whisper of Blood, edited by Ellen Datlow, Morrow Books, \$22.00 (ISBN 0-688-10361-8)

There are many similarities between the New York book industry and the Hollywood film industry. One of these kinships is that sequels are rarely as good as the originals. However, once in a great while, a sequel comes along which *surpasses* the original. A good example is *A Whisper of Blood*, Datlow's follow-up to her original vampire anthology, *Blood Is Not Enough*.

The lead story, "Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep," by Suzy McKee Charnas, concerns a very different type of vampire. Rose Blum, an elderly woman who recently committed suicide, finds herself as a spirit haunting the New York City apartment where she died. Before long, an angel arrives to escort her to her final judgment. She is understandably apprehensive about meeting God and refuses to go. The angel then informs her that the only way to keep her spirit connected to the physical world is to regularly drink some blood from a *willing* donor.

As luck would have it, Rose's granddaughter, Stephanie, decides to move into the apartment until the estate is settled. The ghostly vampire and the young woman quickly develop a symbiotic relationship. In return for a few sips of blood each night, Rose uses her supernatural insights to help counsel Stephanie about her future.

The climax of this charming tale is gentle, yet satisfying. Definitely one of the most original vampire stories I've read in a long time.

Thomas Tessier is an amazingly talented writer who deserves far more recognition than he is currently receiving. His story, "Infidel" is another fascinating example of a unique interpretation of vampirism. In this case it concerns religious faith, and how some manifestations of faith can warp to the point where they no longer resemble the original beliefs that spawned them.

The weakest story in the book is "Teratisms" by Kathe Koja. There seemed to be an interesting tale somewhere in all those words, but Koja's writing is so incoherent and fragmentary, it's hard to determine whether she's simply trying to be "artsy," or if she's in grave need of a remedial course in English composition.

A Whisper of Blood also features a number of excellent stories by some of the finest writers in the dark fantasy genre, including: Jonathan Carroll, Thomas Ligotti, David J. Schow, K.W. Jeter, Pat Cadigan, and Robert Silverberg.

**

Clive Barker's Shadows in Eden, edited by Stephen Jones, Underwood-Miller Books, \$39.95 (ISBN 0-88733-073-8)

If you're the type of person who values a book not only for its contents, but also for its look and feel, then this is definitely a volume you'll want to add to your collection. The book is beautifully bound, literally packed with illustrations (most of them drawn by Barker), and features numerous photos. The endpaper artwork by Stephen Player exquisitely captures the essence of Barker's graphic fiction.

Don't expect much in the way of criticism here, this book is primarily a tribute to Barker and could be overpowering if read in huge chunks. Sort of like eating five gallons of chocolate ice cream in a single sitting.

One of the highlights is Stephen King's typically eloquent introduction, another is the comprehensive bibliography of Barker's work. Many of his American fans will also be interested in the detailed look at Barker's stage plays, including reproductions of various playbills.

There are also several reviews of specific novels and collections, most notably by Gary Hoppenstad, Lisa Tuttle, and Leanne C. Harper.

As much as *Shadows in Eden* is a book for die-hard Barker fans, it is additionally a rather in-depth and insightful look at the current state of the dark fantasy genre.

**

Invitation to Murder, edited by Ed Gorman & Martin H. Greenberg, Dark Harvest Books, \$21.95 (ISBN 0-913165-65-4)

"A young woman is found dead on the apartment floor." This is the basic element which eighteen different authors were given, then told to take in any direction they chose. The resulting stories are amazingly diverse and entertaining, involving murder, suicide, accidental death, and virtually every type of mystery angle you can imagine.

One of the most ingenious tales is "Invitation to Murder" by Richard Laymon. It concerns a writer struggling to come up with an idea for a story to contribute to an anthology entitled *Invitation to Murder*. Much of the tale is obviously a fascinating autobiographical glimpse at Laymon's own imagination as it creates, then discards various story ideas. As luck would have it, the fictional author is soon interrupted by a new neighbor who insists on playing her stereo at an ear-shattering volume. A confrontation ensues which eventually builds to one of Laymon's patented *twist* endings.

One of the most disturbing stories in the collection (and all the more powerful because of its brevity) is "Anytime I Want" by Andrew Vachss. It paints a vivid portrait of a human monster who repeatedly abused his six children; subjecting the four girls to his sickening sexual fantasies, and savagely beating the two boys for even the slightest justification.

When Denise, one of the daughters, is found stabbed to death in her apartment, the brothers decide to take matters into their own hands.

Vachss has a tough, no-nonsense writing style that sends chills up your spine as you read. He's definitely one of the current masters of the *hard-boiled* school of detective fiction.

Invitation to Murder also features noteworthy stories by: Bill Pronzini, Gary Brandner, William F. Nolan, Nancy Pickard, Rex Miller, Judith Kelman, and Loren D. Estleman. It's one of the best "theme" mystery anthologies to come along in quite a while.

**

The Bradbury Chronicles: Stories in Honor of Ray Bradbury, edited by William F. Nolan & Martin H. Greenberg, ROC Books, \$19.95 (ISBN 0-451-45134-1)

Welcome to another installment in the seemingly endless supply of anthologies by Martin H. Greenberg,

an editor who seems to have an anthology for every current fad, movie, celebrity, and anniversary that you can imagine. Occasionally, a few of these collections have been interesting, but most have been lame efforts.

This volume could almost be considered as a companion book to *Foundation's Friends: Stories in Honor of Isaac Asimov*, also edited by Greenberg. Bradbury did the preface for that book, Asimov returns the favor in this new collection.

Bradbury's enormous popularity has always been due more to his beautifully lyrical writing style than to the concepts of his stories. No doubt the contributing authors found it difficult to attain the flavor of his style without inadvertently lapsing into parody. (Except for William Nolan's tale, which is *intended* as a parody.)

James Kisner, Roberta Lannes, and Robert Sheckley expand on Bradbury's Martian stories. William Relling Jr. and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro re-examine the vampire family of "The Homecoming." Chad Oliver and Bruce Francis take us back to "The Lake." Charles L. Grant explores the erotic elements in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Orson Scott Card pays a long overdue visit to Douglas Spaulding of *Dandelion Wine*. And the inspiration for Gregory Benford's "Centigrade 233" is rather obvious.

There is even a previously unpublished story by the Grand Master himself, entitled "The Troll," a humorous tale about a meeting between an eminent psychiatrist and a troll who lives under a certain bridge during the summer months.

All in all, the contributors do an admirable job of honoring one of the greatest and most influential writers the world has ever seen, regardless of genre. Treat yourself to a copy of *The Bradbury Chronicles*.

REVIEW
by Bob Morrish

Clive Barker's Shadows In Eden, edited by Stephen Jones, Underwood-Miller, 468 pp., October, 1991. \$39.95

This sizable tome, sort of a mid-career retrospective, features numerous articles both by and about Barker. The vast majority are reprints, and an even greater majority offer unblushing adulation of Barker's work; there's little new, or negative, to be found here.

As with all such books of this type, there is the distinct danger that the collection will become the literary equivalent of a hand job: a series of repetitive *strokes*, each bit of praise seemingly more gushing than the last, culminating in a climax -- or, in this case, an index. Fortunately though, *Shadows In Eden* possesses a few

extras that give it a leg up on the competition.

First, there's the matter of Barker's art: the various sketches and drawings scattered throughout are a welcome diversion, and serve to literally illustrate another facet of Barker's talent. Next, there are dozens of *sound bites* -- brief quotes excerpted from interviews, articles, etc. -- littering the page margins, and many of these brief bits are fascinating in their own right. Finally, there is a fair amount of material dealing with Barker's early, pre-*Books Of Blood* days, when he was authoring plays such as *Frankenstein In Love*; in particular, there is a lengthy piece by Peter Atkins concerning this period, as well as several cast photos and poster reproductions.

In spite of these aforementioned high points, it's still vitally important that readers of *Shadows In Eden* take heed of Steve Jones' advice in his Editor's Note: "This is a book to be dipped into, not read cover-to-cover in one sitting." Follow that advice, and you'll likely find this book to be an enjoyable experience; ignore it, and your overdose on Barker-praise will be so severe that a visit from the Cenobites would seem a welcome respite.

REVIEW

by T. Liam McDonald

Sacrifice, by Andrew Vachss, Alfred A. Knopf, 320 pp., \$20.00 (ISBN 0-679-40283-7)

Andrew Vachss writes some of the most compelling, most satisfying, most horrifying fiction available, yet he still remains lamentably unread by many readers of horror. This is a shame, because Vachss' novels about Burke are more exciting and scary than anything being written in either the crime or horror genres. They are a lean, cold, shocking flash of lightning, illuminating places where the light never shines, and we are alternately repelled and fascinated and outraged by what we see in the shadows of everyday life. This stuff is so hard it makes the "splatter punks" look like a bunch of masturbating teenagers.

You see, Andrew Vachss is a man with a mission: a lawyer dedicated to defending children that are preyed upon by the sickest element of our society. The molesters and pedophiles (a distinction which needs to be made because pedophiles don't see themselves as molesters, but more on that later), the abusers and baby killers, the parents who shouldn't be parents and the backward system that allows all these things to continue: these are the people who Andrew Vachss battles daily using the legal system. Burke, on the other hand, is an outlaw who doesn't need to follow the rules of the system, and so,

naturally, he gets the job done and done well.

Who is Burke? In the six novels in which he appears we are given only passing clues to his history, but each clue is another piece in a puzzle that brings us closer to understanding this complex character. If Vachss had laid it all out at the beginning, Burke wouldn't be nearly so interesting. *Sacrifice* provides still more pieces of Burke's past that add to our continuing understanding of this character. The elements that shaped him are gradually coming into focus, but not enough to diminish the essential mystery of the character. He is a tragic figure, fated to always be the hunter, the avenger; compelled by forces outside his control to seek the predators and extract a deadly vengeance.

In *Sacrifice*, Vachss twists some traditional horror themes (satanism, witchcraft), giving them his own unique spin. The book centers around a young boy named Luke who killed a baby. Burke is convinced that Luke wasn't responsible for the murder, that he was programmed to kill by his parents, who used the trappings of Satanism to terrify, subjugate, and molest their son, and others, while they videotaped it. Burke is after the parents and their circle of child killers, and he isn't interested in sending them to jail. Along the way he takes on another case, involving a missing baby, that leads him to Queen Thana, the head of a circle practicing obeah: Caribbean witchcraft. He lands on the wrong side of the Queen when he takes one of her juju bags, thinking it contains the body of the missing baby. When he returns it, the Queen offers to help him find who he is looking for, and gives Burke unique insight not only into his quarry, but into himself.

Within this framework we are given short portraits of Burke's world, which includes a forger named Leroy and his dog Barko; the deadly Mongolian Max the silent man; Mama, with her Chinese restaurant that fronts various other enterprises, but doesn't serve many customers; the Mole, a demented version of Mr. Wizard; and the aptly named Wolfe, a DA bent on putting the "freaks" away.

There is a powerful, chilling encounter with a wealthy, secure man who Burke calls The Mentor: a pedophile who is too well-connected for Burke to kill. Burke tells it: "The Mentor told me his philosophy -- silky voice wrapped around lying words. Sodomizing children is love. Taking pictures of it happening was preserving that special love . . . icons to a perfect moment in time." Burke uses the Mentor's "love" of children to find the child molesters he seeks. It is an unholy alliance, but it does the job.

Vachss' New York is an endless parade of nightmares, populated by people working outside of the law, either doing good or doing evil or just trying to survive. It is a horrifying world, made more horrifying by the simple fact that it is all too real. At times it seems like the only way to deliver justice is to break the law, and one doesn't stop to wonder about the legality of things here: you do

what you have to do to survive and to get the job done. Burke is a criminal, and there's no way around that fact. But he's a criminal who fights the good fight for those who have no rights.

Is the character of Burke a projection of the author? That's not for us to say, but it seems that Burke's swift, efficient, and sure results provide a satisfaction to both reader and writer that is not available within the confines of the American judicial system. It is certainly more satisfying to see a child molester's brains splattered against a wall than to see him traipse off to therapy, where he will learn still more efficient ways of preying on the defenseless. These books offer Vachss the unique opportunity to reach people with his message: that we are destroying ourselves when we fail to protect the children, that this cycle of abuse will continue unless we try to stop it, that we are too often blind to the horrors going on right in front of us, that the system is failing our children, and that we will pay for that failure.

Sacrifice is Vachss' best book yet. He expertly manipulates the traditional myths of the werewolf and the vampire to fit his own view, which is that these myths are all too true: they've just been misinterpreted. Indeed, it seems like Vachss just keeps getting better, honing his plots, further tightening his lean prose, exploring the unplumbed depths of his many characters, showing us America's underbelly, its dark side. It doesn't get any darker, and you will find no horror books as powerful as those of Andrew Vachss.

REVIEW
by David Kuehls

Night Stalking: A 20th Anniversary Kolchak Companion, by Mark Dawidziak, Image Publishing, October 1991, 155pp., \$14.95, (ISBN 0-9627508-3-7)

The whistle?

Darren McGavin used to open every *Night Stalker* episode whistling that same catchy tune. But author Mark Dawidziak makes no mention of that.

But that's the only thing Dawidziak -- television columnist for the Akron Beacon Journal and author of *The Columbo Phile* -- leaves out in this all-inclusive study of, arguably, the best horror television show in the past twenty years.

On January 12, 1982 ABC aired a modest vampire thriller set in Las Vegas starring TV vet McGavin as Carl Kolchak, wise-guy reporter. It was a smash. *The Night Stalker* was the highest rated television movie up until that time (even beating out the Emmy-Award winning *Brian's Song*), and it spawned another movie (*The Night*

Strangler) and 20 one-hour episodes for the 1974-1975 television season.

Dawidziak takes us backstage. First to the pilot movie, where he interviews and profiles "The Four-Legged Monster" who brought *The Night Stalker* to the small screen: Jeff Rice, who penned the original novel and got shut out of everything thereafter; Richard Matheson, who did the screenplay; Dan Curtis, who produced; and McGavin, who starred as a modern-day Van Helsing.

Part II of the book is a look at *The Night Strangler*. Part III is plot summaries, credits, and comments on all 20 TV episodes. And Part IV addresses a few questions, like the Kolchak sequel.

Dawidziak, as they say, has done his homework. He's a genre fan (writing for such magazines as *Cinefantastique*) but also a TV critic, and so he gives the reader two perspectives on *The Night Stalker*: Its place in horror history. And its place in television history.

But what about the whistle?

TRASH THEATRE (Con't from page 64)

3. Alligators are native to East Texas, but crocodiles aren't. It's unclear if Jud's critter is actually a croc -- it's hard to tell when they're rubber in the close ups -- he's bought or traded for or stolen from a circus or zoo, or if his referring to it as a croc is his way of making himself and his critter more elite; something exotic, and therefore a way of upgrading his personal image, which is a thing a fella like Jud sorely needs, short of a swift execution.

4. Entertainment as we see it, anyway, which doesn't necessarily mean tap dancing and yodeling.



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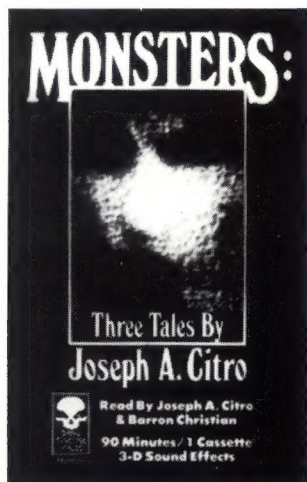
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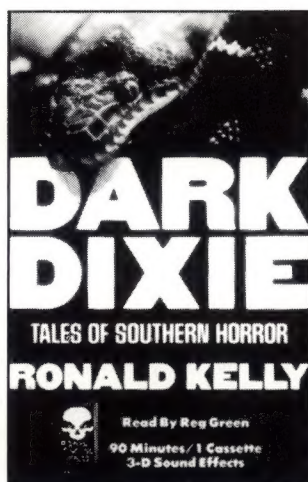
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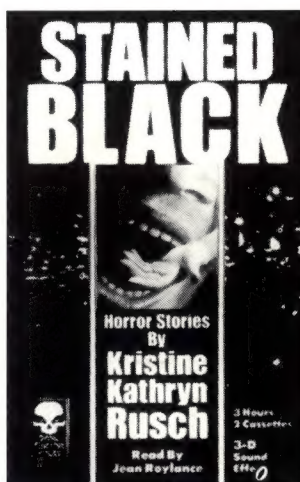
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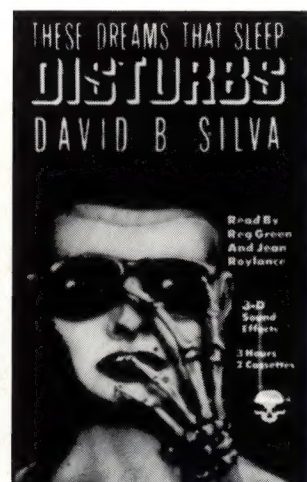
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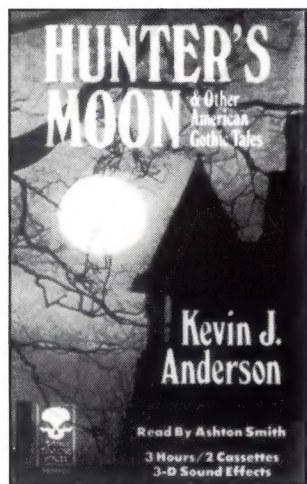
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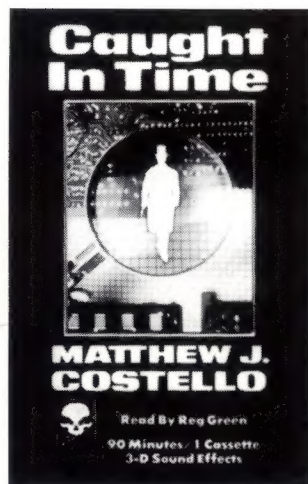
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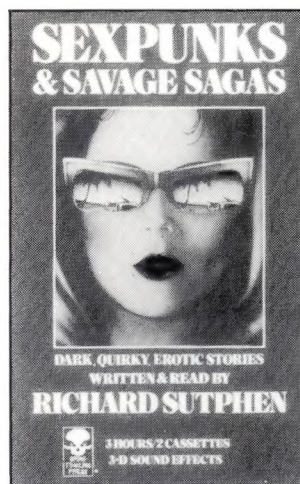
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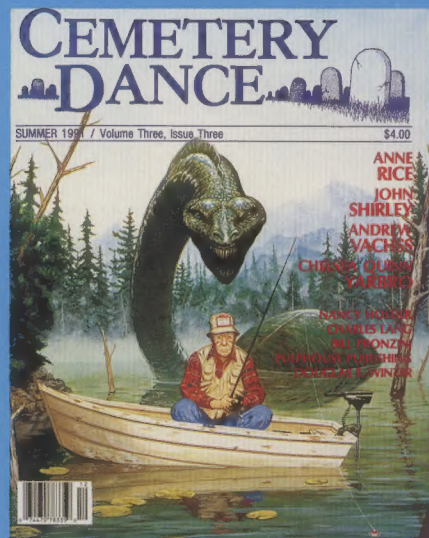
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